

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF INTERACTION IN
TERMS OF LINGUISTIC, AFFECTIVE, AND SOCIAL FACTORS:
A STUDY OF NATIVE SPEAKER - NON-NATIVE
SPEAKER COMMUNICATION IN A NATURAL SETTING

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF INTERACTION IN TERMS OF LINGUISTIC,
AFFECTIVE, AND SOCIAL FACTORS: A STUDY OF NATIVE SPEAKER – NON-
NATIVE SPEAKER COMMUNICATION IN A NATURAL SETTING

by

Guang Xu

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ABSTRACT

This study is intended to examine how learners' language and affective variables influence their interaction with native speakers, and conversely how such interaction influences students' language and affective variables. The affective variables are advocated to be important in the learning process. By the socio-educational model, Gardner advanced a dynamic process between affective variables and learning experiences/outcomes. Therefore, in addition to the conventional linguistic dimension that was commonly used to examine the role of interaction in second language acquisition, I added an affective dimension to the present study of interaction between Chinese ESL students and native English speakers in Canada.

During the study, a questionnaire was used to provide quantified general descriptions of the native speaker -- non-native speaker (NS-NNS) interaction. Then, qualitative data were collected through interviews, which unveiled how individual students made sense of particular situations and experiences of interaction. Emphasis was given to the qualitative approach, and research findings were analyzed from three aspects: linguistic, affective, and social.

In this study, the linguistic benefit of communicating with NSs was most obvious in fluency, vocabulary and expression, and sometimes pronunciation. But, except for fluency, the other two benefits were frequently situational and selective. The results indicated that, linguistically, interaction can be facilitative to language learning, but cast doubt on the proposal that interaction actually leads to acquisition.

In terms of affective variables, as predicted by the socio-educational model, a dynamic relationship between anxiety/confidence and interaction was found in the study.

L2 anxiety and confidence considerably influenced students' interaction with NSs, and conversely, interaction with NSs may gradually modify students' general anxiety and confidence level. Three factors were adopted to assess learning motivation, and they are: attitudes, desire, and intensity. I found that most students maintained very positive attitudes toward interaction with NSs, and all informants exhibited considerable desire for having more contact with NSs. However, a significant gap between students' attitude/desire and their interaction intensity was exposed. Reasons for this discrepancy were: language barriers, limited opportunities, weak social support from some NSs, and students' lack of self-discipline. It was confirmed that, through interaction with NSs, students' language was improved and personal experiences enriched, which motivated them to further communicate.

Finally, the critical perspective that looks into the social support of NS-NNS communication lent us a perspective to understand the gap between attitudes/desire and intensity found in the study. Because of subjective norms and significant others, students sometimes were unable to turn positive attitudes into practice. So this perspective is important to understanding the findings that students' anxiety, self-confidence, and motivation (esp. intensity) varied with situations and interlocutors. Such inconsistency implied that the affective filter is not an inherent trait of a language learner, but one that is socially constructed.

So far, research findings obtained through the present study demonstrated that the effect between affective variables and interaction is reciprocal. Also it is both reasonable and desirable to interpret the role of interaction from all three aspects.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since researchers believe that interacting with others in the second language (L2) is important to acquisition, the role of interaction has received great attention and intensive study for many decades. Most research has focused on how interaction may help to improve learners' grammar and skills in the L2. However, as far as such linguistic outcomes are concerned, researchers found that though interaction may facilitate acquisition, it cannot *lead to* it. The influence is selective and indirect (Sato, 1986; Long, 1996). As a second language learner myself, I felt that interacting and socializing with native speakers (NSs) are beneficial in many other ways. For example, through interaction, I got familiar with the culture, felt more related to the target language community, and became comfortable speaking. I believed that such non-linguistic outcomes should also be taken into consideration when analyzing the role of interaction. Indeed, it was argued that the role of interaction is far more complex than has been conceived. Other aspects, such as cognitive, affective, and social, that involved in the process have called for our attention.

Gardner's socio-educational model (1985) of second language acquisition (SLA) postulates that language learning is a dynamic process in which some affective variables influence language achievement, and conversely the achievement and experiences of learning the language can have an effect on affective variables. This point of view was supported by neurobiological research, which revealed that, in the brain, cognition is intimately integrated with the neural mechanisms for affect (Schumann, 1994). By

emphasizing affective variables as factors that can both influence language learning and evolve out of it as non-linguistic outcomes, the socio-educational model promised to lend a perspective to the present study of interaction. Inspired by this, I decided to add an affective dimension, in addition to the linguistic one, to the study of interaction. I hope that by further examining the relationship between affective variables and learners' communication experiences, we can understand the role of interaction in language learning more comprehensively.

Thus, I intended to carry out a study that examines how learners' language and affective variables would influence their interaction in L2, and how the interaction would influence language and affective variables. Studies that tested the socio-educational model were all product-centered quantitative ones, and studies of interaction were often conducted in classroom environments. Therefore, I decided to conduct a process-centered qualitative study of L2 interaction that happened outside of the classroom to fill this gap in literature. Also, despite a large population in Canada, Chinese originated ESL student did not receive corresponding attention in the literature of SLA. But being able to know some of them personally, I was surprised by the limited contact they had with NS after class. Therefore, I chose ESL students came from China as my target group, and investigated their interaction with NS outside of the classroom. The following questions were raised as a guide to my study:

- What kind of opportunities do Chinese ESL students have to interact with native speakers in a natural setting?
- How did the language and affective variables influence their interaction with NS,

and vice versa?

- What kind of difficulties and barriers did they have?

This study used a questionnaire as an entry to the research problem. The questionnaire obtained from 25 Chinese ESL students provided quantified general descriptions of the interaction between the students and NS. The followed on qualitative inquiry collected data from 8 informants, and revealed how individual students made sense of particular situations and experiences of interaction with NS. Two forms of data were collected sequentially in the study, but were analyzed and interpreted concurrently to seek convergence among the results. Priority and emphasis gave to the qualitative approach, and students' attitudes and experiences were understood within contexts.

In the next chapter, a review of literature with regard to interaction, the socio-educational model, willingness to communicate, the critical perspective of L2 communication, and the affective variables is presented. In Chapter 3, descriptions of the methodology, sampling and procedures, and the participants are given. In Chapter 4, research findings obtained through the questionnaire and interviews are outlined. In Chapter 5, based on the findings I finally draw the conclusions, and discuss them in relation to literature and practice.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 The Study of Interaction in SLA

The role of interaction has received great concern and intensive study for many decades, since researchers tend to believe that interacting with others in the L2 may lead to, or at least facilitate language acquisition; yet a vast discrepancy lies between the reasons for these conclusions and the mechanisms identified to account for these. Most interaction research at present focuses on how it helps to improve L2 learners' proficiency.

Interaction is defined as communication between individuals, particularly when they are negotiating meaning in order to prevent a breakdown in communication (Ellis, 1999). It is a process that produces both input and output. The term *input* is taken from information processing, but in SLA it is defined as oral/written data that learners are exposed to. However, learners do not take in everything they are exposed to, either because some of the input is not understood, or because it is not attended to (Ellis, 1986). *Intake* refers to the part of input that is "let in" by the learner. *Output* is the process through which L2 learners test their hypothesis about the second language form and use via oral or written production (Gass, 1997).

It is assumed that language acquisition involves receiving input, processing input to intake, and producing the language. But due to internal and external restraints, only part of the input becomes intake, and only part of the intake can actually be used by the learner. Therefore, researchers are interested in how potentially processible input permeates the learner's mind and becomes output.

Part of the research that upholds the role interaction plays in the input-to-output mechanism is based on the theory of *comprehensible input*. Krashen (1981) hypothesized that we acquire by understanding language that is a little beyond ($i+1$) our current level (i) with the aid of extra-linguistic context or our knowledge of the world. Given the evidence that exposure to a language is not sufficient for acquisition, he proposed comprehension be the essence of the acquisition process. Similarly, Long (1983) noted that in order to discern and internalize the L2 forms and structures, learners have to above all understand the meaning of the message that conveyed via linguistic codes.

A number of studies that examine L2 interaction and attempt to relate it to linguistic needs, particularly the need for comprehensible input, of the learner have been developed. For example, the study examining acquisition of question formation indicated that interaction can increase the pace of acquisition (Mackey, 1999). However, it is difficult to identify the relationship between comprehension of meaning in L2 input and the internalization of L2 forms. By investigating the procedures that NS and NNS conduct to avoid or repair breakdowns in their conversation, Long (1983) provocatively claimed that input is made comprehensible through modifying interactional structures rather than through simplifying linguistic input. Thus L2 interaction is argued to facilitate acquisition by allowing learners to “notice the gap” between their command of the language and correct their use to make it target-like, which by far enhances comprehensibility (Schmidt & Frota, 1986). The term *negotiation* is later adopted to refer to this specific form of interaction that involves gap-noticing and repairing. The research focus turned to negotiation as well.

“*Negotiation* refers to communication in which participants’ attention is focused

on resolving a communication problem as opposed to communication in which there is a free-flowing exchange of information” (Gass, 1997, p. 107). During negotiation, both learners and interlocutors can check the comprehensibility of their own speech. They can request clarification, confirmation, or reiteration of what the others have said, and they can modify their sounds, structures, and vocabulary toward greater comprehensibility. It seems that the study of interaction, though inspired by idea of comprehensible input, has now moved on to analyze the uncomprehended part of the message. As a result, White (1987) claimed that what is necessary for L2 development is not comprehensible input, but *incomprehensible input*. By this, she suggested that it is the incomprehensible part of the conversation that triggers modifications to language, and finally become an impetus for learners to recognize the inadequacy of their interlanguage system. As Varonies and Gass (1985) illustrated, comprehension difficulty allows learners to realize that linguistic modification is necessary and in turn to focus their attention on forms that otherwise be unnoticed.

In this vein, Pica (1994) argued for negotiation a powerful role in L2 learning by proposing the “twofold potential” (p.508) of negotiation. They are: (1) to assist L2 comprehension of meaning, and (2) to draw attention to L2 form, which was argued to be two of the conditions for SLA (see, for example, Krashen, 1981, 1985; Long, 1983, 1985). Pica (1992) suggested that negotiation as a process not only emphasises communication of message meaning, it also provides an opportunity to focus on message form. See the following as an example:

NNS: and tree with stick

NS: you mean the *trees* have *branches*?

NNS: yes

(Pica, 1992)

Another part of research that upholds the role of interaction in acquisition, on the other hand, builds their contention on *comprehensible output*. For example, Swain (1985) claims that it is often possible for learners to understand the meaning in the L2 without grasping its morphosyntax. But in order to be comprehensible in extended discourse, learners must attain a certain level of output grammaticality. Thus, through producing language, either spoken or written, language acquisition/learning may occur (Swain, 1985). According to Swain (1993), there are four ways in which output might play a role in the process of L2 learning: (1) Develops fluency. It is both intuitively and though research supported that one gains fluency by frequently using the language. (2) Helps learners to move from semantic processing to syntactic processing, since producing language forces learners to recognize what they do not know. (3) Allows for hypothesis testing. (4) Obliges learners to modify their output.

Despite the strong argument for interaction, negotiation and output in linguistic development, some researchers showed that when learners communicate in L2, they fail to notice nontarget-like features in their interlanguage unless indicated explicitly (e.g. Schmidt & Frota, 1986). It is also suggested that negotiation may be beneficiary only to certain learners (Mackey & Philp, 1998). And Ellis (1995) provided another example of acquisition without output. The “premodified” group, a group that did no speaking at all, made modest but clear gains in vocabulary, gaining, in fact, more words per minute than the group that interacted with the native speakers.

In addition, there are case histories of those who have developed very high level

of competence from input alone without interaction with other people. Examples are Richard Boydell suffered from cerebral palsy and acquired language through listening and reading alone (Krashen, 1985, 1993). Studies thus confirmed that people can develop extremely high level of language and literacy competence without any language production (interaction) at all (Krashen, 1994).

As has been discussed, interaction is an agent that mediates input and output. During the process, learners are exposed to the L2 and are required to produce appropriate response in L2. It is potentially facilitative to language acquisition, but as far as linguistic outcomes are concerned, there is not enough evidence to suggest that interaction will *lead to* acquisition, which indicates that learners internalize input and develop their interlanguage system through interaction.

As Sato (1986) and Long (1996) have pointed out, since there are many factors involved in the learning process, the role of interaction is far more complex than has been conceived, and its influence on acquisition can be claimed only as selective and indirect. Indeed, interaction entails linguistic, social, and cognitive processes at one time—the linguistic process of formulation, adjustments, and repetition, the social process of signalling and response moves, and the cognitive process of attention drawing and comprehending, all of which have been claimed to play a role in successful L2 learning (Pica, 1992).

After analyzing the linguistic process that involved in interaction, research ended up with the conclusion that interaction has only “selective” and “indirect” facilitative influence on language acquisition. But what about the social and cognitive processes that also comprise interaction? Shall we consider the role that interaction plays in SLA from a

more comprehensive perspective?

2.2 The Socio-Educational Model

The socio-educational model (Gardner, 1979, 1983, 1985) of SLA postulates that language learning is a dynamic process in which some affective variable influence language achievement, and reversely the achievement and experiences of learning the language can have an effect on affective variables.

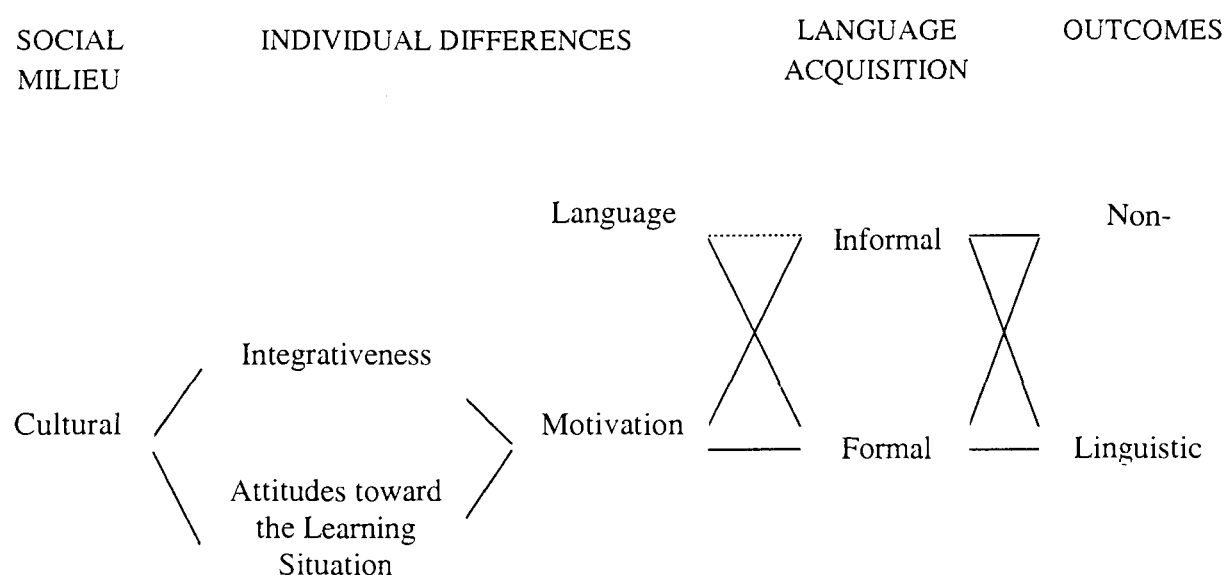
Gardner argued that the student in a second language class is unlike a student (even the same student) in any other class. In other classes, the student faces the task of acquiring some knowledge and skills, which is characteristic of his/her own cultural community. In the second language class, however, the same student is required to learn materials that are characteristic of another cultural group. While the discrete elements (e.g. grammar rules, lexical items) of an L2 can be taught explicitly as other school subjects, language learning is also socially and culturally bound, which requires the incorporation of a wide range of elements of the L2 culture. Indeed, Gardner refers to the learning of a second language as “a social psychological experiment” (1983, p. 220), where we observe a person’s behaviour in response to some type of social stimulus.

By proposing the socio-educational model, Gardner assigned extra emphasis to the role that affective variables play in L2 acquisition. Such variables are argued to be important since they direct individuals to work harder in both formal and informal language contexts.

2.2.1 Model Description:

The socio-educational model of L2 acquisition is proposed (Gardner, 1979, 1983, 1985) to account for four major elements: (1) the social milieu in which language learning takes place; (2) individual difference variables, which mainly consist of language aptitude and motivation; (3) language acquisition contexts, which include formal and informal situations; and (4) acquisition outcomes, which can be linguistic or non-linguistic. See the socio-educational model (Gardner, 1985, p. 153) in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The Socio-educational Model of Second Language Acquisition.



While there have been substantial theories and studies that concern individual differences in SLA, it is only recently that SLA has been considered as an interpersonal and intergroup phenomenon (Cenoz & Valencia, 1993). In situations where L2 is available in the immediate environment, social context and social milieu become key

elements in the social psychological construct of SLA. But because of the difficulty in assessing relevant cultural beliefs, most research associated with the model has ignored the social milieu. As a result, Gardner called for studies that explore this critical component.

Attitudes toward the learning situation involves attitudes toward the instructor, the course, the textbook, language laboratory, etc. It is hypothesised that such variables will influence learning motivation. *Integrativeness* refers to positive affect towards the other language community. Gardner argued that since L2 learning is associated with another cultural group, the motivation to learn the language could involve attitudes toward that community. To illustrate, integrativeness

implies an openness to, and respect for, other cultural groups and ways of life; in the extreme, it might involve complete identification with the community (and possibly even withdrawal from one's original group). Thus, a core aspect of the integrative disposition is some sort of a psychological and emotional identification (Dörnyei, 2003, p. 5).

Note that the socio-educational model focuses on language learning taking place in the classroom, thus two classes of attitudes—attitudes toward the learning situation and integrativeness, are proposed to support motivation which can promote language learning. At a more general level, integrativeness and attitudes toward the learning situation are categorized as language attitudes (Gardner & Tremblay, 1994).

Gardner suggested that “achievement in an L2 is dependent upon two individual

difference factors, one reflecting a cognitive or ability dimension, and the other an affective and motivational one” (1983, p.222). He argued that although other factors such as pedagogical differences, teacher variables, or learner strategies can be influential in certain contexts, the primary determinants of learning results in any language-learning context will be the learner ability (referred to as language aptitude in the model) and affective factors.

In the model, it is proposed that two individual difference variables (motivation and language aptitude) interact with second language acquisition contexts to promote language proficiency. In formal contexts (i.e. classroom), both motivation and aptitude play a role in the acquisition process. But “motivation is expected to play a more dominant role than aptitude in informal contexts” (Gardner, 1983, p. 222). As it was reasoned, “motivation levels will determine whether or not students avail themselves of such informal opportunities to learn the language” (p. 223). Gardner asserted that language aptitude is still influential in an informal context (e.g., language clubs, excursion programs), but motivational factors dominate because they determine whether or not students even take advantage of these contexts.

He argued that both formal and informal language-learning contexts have both linguistic and nonlinguistic outcomes. *Linguistic outcomes* refer to any increase in knowledge, skills, fluency, familiarity, etc. with the language. *Nonlinguistic outcomes* refer to various affective characteristics such as attitudes toward L2 learning, attitudes toward the target language group, anxiety about learning and using L2, etc.

2.2.2 Empirical Studies that Tested the Model:

Investigations associated with this conceptualization were conducted in the past decades. Gardner (1983) studied a sample of 200 grade 7 children (12 year old) learning French, and used a causal modeling technique (Linear Structural Relations, or LISREL) to identify relations among variables. At the beginning of the research, attitude, motivation, and language aptitude measures were gathered, and French achievement measures were obtained toward the end of the programme. Test of the model indicated that integrativeness and attitudes toward the learning situation (these two factors are also shown to be substantially correlated) are significant “causes” of motivation, while motivation and aptitude are significant “causes” of French achievement. The test of goodness of fit in this model yielded a χ^2 value of 131.12 with 109 degree of freedom, which was not significant, indicating a reasonable fit of the model to account for correlations among the measures.

Later in 1997, Gardner, Tremblay, and Masgoret investigated a number of individual difference measures to contrast their predictive validities and to evaluate their contributions in a causal model of SLA. Findings indicated that substantial links existed among affective measures and achievement. In a recent study by Masgoret and Gardner (2003), results again suggested that the relationships of L2 achievement to measures of attitudes, motivation, and orientations were consistently positive, and the correlation of motivation with language achievement was higher than for the other measures. Although there may be different measures for motivation, attitudes, and achievement, research associated with this model generally provides support for it. The correlation between motivation and achievement indicated that motivation leads to greater achievement, and at the same time, the level of language proficiency attained and experiences with the

language can have an effect on affective variables.

However, since most experiments that test the model were conducted in Canadian environment learning either French or English as a second language, the ability to generalize the results in other sociocultural contexts remains a question.

2.2.3 Discussions of the Model:

By emphasizing the sociocultural dimension of L2 motivation, Gardner's approach offered a macro perspective that allowed researchers to draw inferences about intercultural communication and affiliation. Such an approach is appropriate for examining a wide range of important issues, such as language contact, language globalization, multiculturalism, and power relations among different ethnolinguistic groups (Dörnyei, 2003). As Dörnyei (1994b, p. 519) proclaimed,

I believe that the most important milestone in the history of L2 motivation research has been Gardner and Lambert's discovery that success is a function of the learner's attitude toward the linguistic-cultural community of the target language, thus adding a social dimension to the study of motivation to learn an L2.

The traditional research design of L2 motivation is one that collects data through questionnaires and tests, and looks at how motivational attributes of the learner correlate with language proficiency measures in a course. However, it is pointed out that the macro approach is less adequate to account for contextualized learning situations, in which motivation considerably differs. Also, researchers argued that such product-oriented

motivation research is irreconcilable with the inherently process-oriented SLA research.

In his article *Situating Second Language Motivation*, McGroarty (2001) explained that the contextualization of L2 motivation did not happen in isolation but reflected the situated shift in psychology that highlighted the role of the social context in any learning activity. Such a point of view is significant in that it introduced a situated approach characterized by a micro perspective. In this vein, researchers started to examine motivation in light of various aspects of learning contexts, for example, relevance of materials, interest in tasks, teacher behaviour, teaching style, group work characteristics, etc. Researchers also suggested that motivation research needs to focus on specific language behaviours rather than general learning outcomes.

In addition to the debate on the perspective that socio-educational model offers, another informative discussion associated with the model is about research methodology. Lambert, Gardner, and associates have been using questionnaires in their studies all along, since it is a mainstream research method in social psychology. However, when asked about this method, thinking it reasonable, Lambert (1968) said that the best way to learn about someone's motivation was probably to sit and chat with him over a bottle of wine for an evening (see Spolsky, 1999). As an example of applying triangulated methodology in motivation study, Spolsky and his colleagues (1991, 1995, 1997) either supplemented questionnaires and surveys with observation of behaviour, or made use of interviews to study the social psychological questions. The case study brought such richness to their data that Spolsky (1999) claimed that to attempt to reduce attitude and motivation to a single scale is clearly distortion. Acknowledging the pioneering work of Gardner and his colleagues, Kalaja and Leppäen (1998) made an echoing call for a richer

methodology in L2 motivation research. They argued that work based solely on questionnaires is limited, and unable to tackle the complexity, variability, and “situatedness” of motivation. Additional techniques they proposed are natural conversations, oral stories, and analyses of autobiographies.

Looking at discussions of the socio-educational model, we have a better understanding of the contributions, limitations, and possibilities of L2 motivation research in the past and future. As Oxford (1996) stated, Gardner and his colleagues have paved the way for us and provided a sound footing that allows us to pursue other routes to expand the theory of language learning motivation toward more comprehensiveness.

2.3 Using the Socio-Educational Model to Account for Interaction

Hopefully and possibly, Gardner’s (1985) socio-educational model may lend a perspective to the present study of interaction. The model is significant in that it directs our attention toward affective variables that will influence language achievement, and it makes clear that there are both linguistic and nonlinguistic outcomes that associate with language programs and learning activities.

Regardless of different stands—comprehensible input, incomprehensible input, or comprehensible output—that researchers took in L2 interaction, most of them limited their study to look at only the linguistic outcomes of interaction, but overlooked the nonlinguistic outcomes. And they often ignored learners’ attitudes and motivation associated with the process. But the socio-educational model has illustrated that affective variables are crucial to language acquisition, and nonlinguistic learning outcomes deserve as much attention as linguistic ones.

From a neural perspective, affect is an integral part of cognition. Cognition can be conceived as “consisting of the perception of stimuli, the emotional appraisal of these stimuli, attention to the stimuli, representation of the stimuli in memory, and the subsequent use of that information in behaviour” (Schumann, 1994, p. 231-32). This process is known as stimulus appraisal system, where the brain emotionally modulates cognition and directs behaviour. As Schumann (1994) pointed out,

The affective/cognitive dichotomy that has characterized SLA (and much psychological) research is belied by a neurobiological perspective, which indicates that both are mutually constitutive of sustained deep learning. A complete account of SLA cannot maintain this dichotomy...“Where is cognition?”—it is in the brain, intimately integrated with the neural mechanisms for affect. (p. 240).

Stemmed from this insight, personal emotions should not be overlooked when studying interaction. Particularly in situations where L2 learners are the minorities and somehow disadvantaged/marginalized in the target language community, their successful or unsuccessful, happy or unhappy experiences of interacting with NS may considerably influence their attitudes toward the L2, and decision of further communication. Being sensitive to affective variables should be both reasonable and desirable to future studies of interaction.

It has not been long that researchers started to stress the nonlinguistic outcomes of L2 learning. In a recent work, MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, and Donovan (2003) argued that nonlinguistic outcomes, resulted from the L2 learning experience, are inherent in

language education and are among its long lasting results. Therefore, in addition to the evaluation of linguistic performance, language programs in general should be evaluated in terms of nonlinguistic outcomes.

Research findings supported their claim by disclosing substantial differences in nonlinguistic outcomes between immersion and nonimmersion students. For example, in Baker and MacIntyre's (2000) study, where nonlinguistic outcomes involve satisfaction with the experience, attitudes, motivation, anxiety, and willingness to communicate (WTC), they found that compared to nonimmersion students, immersion students showed lower communication apprehension, higher WTC, greater perceived competence, and more frequent communication in French (the L2), all of which are believed to enhance language achievement in the long run. It was also found that immersion students have invested more time and effort in learning the language. Similar results were obtained in a later study (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Donovan, 2003), except that this time they find similar levels of L2 communication apprehension among immersion and nonimmersion. Researchers suggested that classroom demands placed on these students may help to explain. As a result, if we evaluate the language programs using criteria that not only look at their linguistic outcomes but also appreciate the non-linguistic outcomes which are long lasting, in both cases the immersion program seems to be more successful.

MacIntyre et al. suggested that it is not enough for students to become communicatively competent in the classroom, for this is no guarantee that learners will actually use the language in other situations. A fundamental goal of L2 instruction should be to produce students who are willing to use the language for authentic communication. And in intensive language programs where strong emphasis is placed on communication

in L2, a focus on the affective variables supporting authentic communication seems especially relevant.

By emphasizing motivation and other affective variables as factors that can both influence language learning and can evolve as nonlinguistic outcomes, the socio-educational model provided us a way to consider the function of interaction. We are presented a possibility to focus on affective variables and examine the role interaction plays in language acquisition. Meantime, there is a call for contextualized studies and studies that focus on learning process in motivation research. The integration of affective variables (including motivation) and interaction within the framework of the socio-educational model may accommodate both desires. A recent extension of such includes the study of learner's willingness to communicate (WTC), which appears to be particularly fruitful.

2.4 Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

Originally developed to describe individual differences in L1 communication, *WTC* is defined as the intention to initiate communication, given a choice (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Conrod, 2001). Research results suggest that WTC constantly predicts the initiation of communication in both L1 and L2. However, in one's first language, WTC is a fairly stable personality trait, while in L2 the situation is more complex, because the learner's foreign language anxiety, perceived communicative competence, and other powerful variables will all react.

MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998) proposed a heuristic "pyramid model" to construct WTC, and characterized it as the individual's "readiness to enter into

discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using an L2” (p. 547). This situated conceptualization allowed researchers to conduct studies in different learning contexts, and studies confirmed two key predictions from this model. First, regardless of the type of program (immersion or nonimmersion), lower anxiety and higher perceived competence are correlated with higher levels of WTC. Second, greater L2 communication experience would lead to higher levels of WTC (e.g. Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Donovan, 2003).

Yashima and associates (2002, 2004) jointly used the socio-educational model and WTC model to investigate relations between L2 learning and communication with Japanese EFL students and students attending short-term or long-term study-abroad programs in the United States. The findings were essentially congruent with those of MacIntyre and Baker’s regarding the two predictions. The results also supported the socio-educational model in that students’ attitudes influenced motivation, which in turn influenced achievement. However, contrary to findings obtained in Canada, Yashima (2002) failed to identify a direct path from motivation to WTC, which suggested that for EFL students in Japan motivation alone was not sufficient to induce WTC and communication. The reason was suggested to lie in the different contexts that underlie studies. Apparently, in Canada, which is officially bilingual, it will not be too hard for speakers of English or French to find an opportunity to practice the other language, but it is not the case for Japanese students wishing to learn English in their own country. Comparably, other studies revealed that students had higher L2 WTC in the immersion classroom than in social settings outside the classroom, which can be attributed to additional effort to find those settings (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Conrod, 2001).

Thus, researchers suggested that it is necessary to have an interlocutor for authentic communication, and social support is particularly important in developing WTC.

In their social psychology work, Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) analyzed that the intention to act will determine the behaviour itself, and there are two factors that decide one's intention to practice, which are attitudes toward the behaviour (the personal factor) and subjective norms (the social factor). The first factor refers to the person's positive or negative evaluation of the consequence of the behaviour and his/her desire to experience the consequence. The second factor, however, is determined by socially based beliefs, where one turns to "significant others" for their evaluation of the behaviour.

The importance of subjective norms has been confirmed by the study that considered both contextual and individual difference variables in L2 use with Anglophone (majority) and Francophone (minority) students attending a Canadian bilingual university (Clément, Baker, & MacIntyre, 2003). And recent research started to focus on the social facet of WTC. As MacIntyre stated (2003),

If WTC represents the decision to initiate communication, given the choice, then communication by minority groups learning a second language with high ethnolinguistic vitality might not be governed by WTC, based on the absence of choice. However, the majority group whose language enjoys strong support is in a situation akin to additive bilingualism and choice to use the second language abounds.

Upon this conclusion, a critical perspective is adopted to view L2 communication.

2.5 The Critical Perspective on L2 Communication

From a critical perspective, Norton (2000) criticized the premise that language learners can choose under what conditions they will interact with the L2 community and that the language learner's access to L2 is a function of one's motivation (e.g. Gardner & MacIntyre, 1992). She thus disapproves the identification of learners as motivated or unmotivated, introverted or extroverted, inhibited or uninhibited, without considering that such affective factors are often socially constructed in inequitable power relations.

Norton's book *Identity and Language Learning: Gender, Ethnicity and Educational Change* (2000) is based on her longitudinal case study with five adult immigrant women in Canada. Through abundant quotes from the participants, Norton illustrated how opportunities to practice speaking English are socially structured for those women. The study revealed that for many immigrants, the linguistic environment represents inequitable relations of power and even hostility, with native speakers "more likely to avoid [learners] than negotiate meaning with them" (p. 113). She argued that when people speak they are not just exchanging information; they are constantly reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. A learner's past history, gender, age, etc. can influence how they understand their relationship to the society and how they create, respond to, and resist opportunities to speak English as a second language.

Norton pointed out that most SLA theories recognize the need for learners to produce the language, but one cannot assume egalitarian relationships between learners and the natives. It is crucial to understand that a learner's motivation to speak is mediated by other investments that may conflict with their desire to speak. Such investments are

often bound to inequitable power relations and gender politics. Similarly, Noels stated:

for those people who have the opportunity for contact with the L2 group, and especially those who come from a relatively low vitality group and are learning a dominant language, interaction with the L2 community, social identity concerns, the integrative orientation, and L2 use in informal contexts may be particularly important. (Noels, 2001, p. 61)

Such a critical perspective is valuable to SLA research, because instead of considering learners as isolated individuals, it emphasizes histories and social connections of the learner.

2.6 The Affective Variables

By the *Affective Filter Hypothesis*, Krashen (1981) proposed that a number of affective variables play a facilitative role in SLA. These variables include: motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence. An affective filter is defined as a screening device in the internal processing system, governed by the acquirers' "motives, needs, attitudes, and emotional states" (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982, p. 46) that allows or prohibits the acceptance of new input. It is claimed that learners with high motivation, good self-image, and low level of anxiety are more likely to success in acquiring a second language.

2.6.1 Motivation:

Motivation is something we cannot see or touch, but it is the human capacity that

directs energy in the pursuit of a goal (Wlodkowski, 1999). A motivated individual is described as one who wants to achieve a particular goal, devotes considerable effort to achieve this goal, and experiences satisfaction in the activities associated with achieving this goal (Gardner, 1985). Both Gardner's Socio-educational Model and Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis assign a significant role to motivation. It is one major factor that researchers look into when examining individual differences.

Earlier in literature, there was a discussion over the instrumental vs. integrative orientation of individual's motivation to learn an L2. *Instrumental orientation* is defined as a person's interest in learning an L2 because of the practical advantages that will accrue to the speaker, whereas *integrative orientation* suggests that the person learns an L2 because of a sincere and personal interest in people and culture represented by the language. The discussion focused on the assertion that integrative orientation is a stronger motivating factor than instrumental orientation (Gardner and Lambert, 1972). Studies carried out in different contexts (e.g. Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1990; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991; Kraemer, 1993), especially in EFL, where limited contact with the target language community is a norm, contradicted the assertion, and indicated that motivations differ according to both the situation of the learner, and the language being learned. In recent works, Gardner (2001) himself pointed out that there is very little evidence, even in their research, to suggest that orientations directly associated with success in learning an L2. Motivation is dynamic, and the old characterization of motivation in terms of integrative versus instrumental orientations is too static and restricted. Therefore, Gardner recommended researchers to focus their attention on motivation rather than on orientation.

Findings from research generally uphold the significance of motivation. Empirical studies that test the socio-educational model have confirmed the role of motivation by identifying a constant correlation between motivation and achievement in classroom environment. An early study conducted by Clément, Gardner & Smythe (1977) compared the initial attitudes and motivation of Grade 8 (13 year olds) English speaking students who did not go for an excursion to Quebec City with students who did but reported little contact with French Canadians and those who did and indicated high contact. In the study, non-participants score lowest in attitude and motivation toward French, with the “low contact” in the middle, and the “high contact” score highest. A constant relationship between learners’ contact with NS and their attitude and motivation toward learning the L2 was found. Later studies of bicultural excursion programmes essentially supported this finding. And motivation is argued to be particularly important in L2 informal learning contexts by orienting the individual to seek for more experience with the L2.

Note that some researchers (Burstall, Jamieson, Cohen & Hargreaves, 1974; Strong, 1984) argued that achievement causes attitudes and motivation, while Gardner et al. proposed a reciprocal causation between them. The socio-educational model “argues that motivation influences language achievement, and language achievement as well as experiences in formal and informal language contexts influence attitudes and motivation (which are viewed as some of the many possible non-linguistic outcomes)” (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993, p. 2).

2.6.2 Anxiety:

Foreign language anxiety is defined as the apprehension experienced when a

situation requires the individual's use of another Language that he/she is not fully proficient (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). Learners of high anxiety may perceive the L2 learning experience as uncomfortable, and be reluctant to try uncertain linguistic forms. The anticipated behaviours may include: poor retrieval of materials from memory, to withdraw from voluntary participation and avoid L2 use for fear of making mistakes (Horwitz et al., 1986). Anxious learners may display behaviours that characterize "unmotivated learners", and anxious learners are likely to become less motivated because of the uneasy emotional status they experience when using L2. However, if a learner is not at all anxious, he/she is unlikely to be motivated to make effort.

Horwitz et al. (1986) proposed three forms to cover foreign language anxiety: (1) communication apprehension, which may or may not be associated with the speech anxiety experienced in L1 contexts; (2) test anxiety; (3) evaluation anxiety, which refers to the person's fear of negative evaluation (both academic and personal) on the basis of their competence and performance in the L2. Researchers assert that it is the third type of anxiety that makes foreign language anxiety distinct from other academic anxieties, such as math anxiety. Because of the intimate relationship between self-concept and self-expression, people, especially adults, may experience apprehension when they cannot express themselves in the new language as fully as they can in their native language.

Literature reveals that language learning classes can be more anxiety provoking than are other courses; foreign language anxiety is more relevant to language learning among adults, and it can have a negative effect on the learning process; listening and speaking are the main sources of anxiety, with unprepared free speech being especially disconcerting (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Also, it is found that both L2 (French) class

anxiety and L2 use anxiety are significantly negatively correlated with language learning (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989).

2.6.3 Self-confidence:

Self-confidence, composed of perceived competence and a lack of anxiety, is conceptually related to language anxiety, except that it emphasizes a positive as opposed to a negative component (Gardner, Tremblay, & Masgoret, 1997). Clément et al. (1977, 1980, 1985, 1994) have focused on self-confidence to examine language acquisition, and the results are informative. They studied Francophone students learning English, and found that positive contact with English speakers led to students' self-confidence of L2, and the confidence will inspire their desire to interact (recalling similar findings generated in WTC studies). Thus, Clément suggested that in bicultural or multicultural settings, self-confidence is a part of motivation arising from the quality and frequency of interaction with target language speakers; meantime, self-confidence leads to motivation to use the language. This model is bi-directional, where self-confidence can both result from and lead to more positive interaction. Finally, through the working of linguistic and especially non-linguistic factors, self-confidence affects language acquisition.

Comparing the socio-educational model with this social context model (Clément, 1980), they share a lot of common features: they both consider the sociocultural influences important to SLA; they both assign significance to the non-linguistic factors involved in language learning; and they both argue for a dynamic reciprocal relationship between affective variables and the learning experiences or outcomes.

socio-educational model and look into the affective variables of interaction. Such a study may also add to the contextualization and process-orientedness of motivation research. Thus, I decided to carry out a study with Chinese originated ESL students to examine how students' language and affective variables would influence their interaction with NS, and how the interaction would influence language and affective variables. The interaction I examine would be authentic communication happened outside of the classroom, and descriptive qualitative data would be obtained to illustrate the problem.

My present study is distinct and significant in three aspects: (1) The theoretical framework, which attempts to integrate the socio-educational model into interaction research, thus adds an affective dimension to the role of interaction in SLA. (2) The qualitative method applied will fulfill a need for triangulated methodology in motivation research. And qualitative methods are extremely appropriate for exploring the social facet of interaction and motivation. (3) The target group of the present study will be Chinese originated ESL students in Canada, which is very different from the target group in most studies—either Francophone or English speakers learning the other official language in Canada. It is good to see that research conducted in other sociocultural contexts has raised some interesting questions about former results and have received exceptional attention, for example, Yashima's serial studies of WTC on Japanese EFL or study-abroad students.

In addition to the above inferences relating to theoretical framework, there are implications for the design of the present study. The present study will focus on three major affective variables—motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence, to collect data. Research on motivation has provided a guidance by apprising that (1) motivation, rather

than orientation, is important to language achievement; (2) motivation, rather than aptitude, is particularly relevant in L2 informal learning contexts; (3) there is a reciprocal causation between motivation and language achievement, which repeatedly has been approved by tests of the socio-educational model, or the WTC model.

By the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), Gardner (1985) proposed three measures to be used to assess learner motivation. They are: (1) attitudes toward the L2, its speakers, and the learning situations; (2) intensity/effort extended in learning; and (3) the desire to learn the L2. These measurements have been extensively applied to motivation related studies. Using a Likert seven alternative response format, the AMTB is a fairly comprehensive and long questionnaire that generates data though quantitative research, however, based on the three accounts one may also design qualitative interview questions to obtain information of learner motivation and attitudes.

By reviewing studies of anxiety, we are informed that it can be studied from three perspectives: (1) *trait anxiety* that considers anxiety as a general personality trait across situations; (2) *state anxiety* that interests the apprehension experienced here-and-now; (3) *situation anxiety* that examines the specific forms of anxiety that occur consistently over time within a given situation. Research suggested that a situation perspective is the best approach to study foreign language anxiety. The key advantage with this perspective is that the respondents are required to make attributions of anxiety to particular sources (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). This approach is also found most appropriate for the present study, since it makes attributions of foreign language anxiety (likely to take a form of evaluation anxiety) to the source of communication with NS.

Finally, to interpret data that deal with an individual's affects and emotions,

introducing the concept of locus of control seems pertinent. *Locus of control* refers to how individuals attribute causes to events that affect them. People can be classified along a continuum from very internal to very external locus of control. Internals generally perceive themselves as responsible for certain occurrences and their actions have a direct bearing on the result. As a contrast, externals believe that happenings in life are controlled by luck, chance, and powerful others, therefore they would most often blame or thank such forces that are beyond their control.

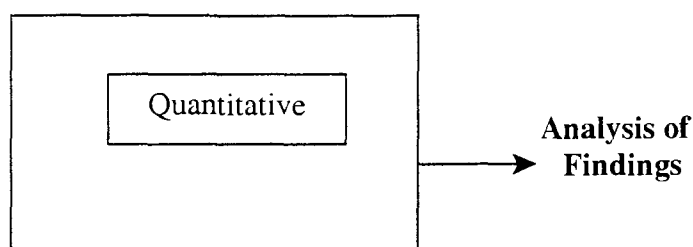
As a generalized expectancy that largely depends on personality traits, locus of control can be used to explain why students from similar cultural background and the same L2 class exhibit diversified attitudes toward communication with NS. For example, some Chinese originated ESL students may blame that they do not have the opportunity to talk with NS, while others may find it not a big problem for them (as long as they try they can always practice English). However, if a number of students are saying that they have difficulty finding social support for interaction, especially those who are not really external in most situations are saying so, we then should pay attention to this problem.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

3.1 Methodology

This study applied an integrated method in a concurrent nested research design (Creswell, 2003). See the visual model below:



Although two forms of data were collected sequentially in the study (quantitative first and qualitative after), they were analyzed and interpreted concurrently at the finally stage to seek convergence among the results. However, priority and emphasis was given to the qualitative approach. Therefore, the qualitative interview at one level provides us detailed information about individuals, while the quantitative survey at another gives some basic knowledge about the sample.

I used a questionnaire as an entry to the research problem. The questionnaire obtained quantified general descriptions of the interaction between ESL students of Chinese origin and native English speakers. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentiles were calculated and reported. The qualitative inquiry was a phenomenological study that collected data on how individual Chinese ESL students (non-native speakers, NNS) make sense of particular situations or experiences of interaction with native

speakers (NS) in a natural setting. Long interviews were directed toward understanding informants' perspectives on their lived experience with the phenomenon. As the researcher, I interpreted the NS-NNS interaction phenomena in terms of the meanings that Chinese ESL students bring to them, described the context of the study in detail, and illustrated different perspectives of the phenomena. Also, I continually revised questions from knowledge and experience that I gathered during the research.

3.2 Sampling and Procedures

Participants in this study were ESL learners from a public university in Newfoundland, Canada. At the opening stage, I introduced myself and the study to all Chinese students in the ESL program at the university, and I invited everyone to participate. An anonymous questionnaire (see **Appendix 1**) was distributed. If any student preferred to be interviewed later, he or she was asked to leave their contact information at the bottom of the questionnaire. Then, at the second stage, upon obtaining written consent (see **Appendix 2**), I carried out semi-structured interviews (see **Appendix 3**) with eight students. A few days prior to the interview, informants were given a list of the questions so that they could think them over and be prepared. During the interview, both audiotape and note-taking were used to record data.

The questionnaire elicited quantitative data for the study. Twenty-five questionnaires were collected from 27 Chinese students who were present at classes on the date the questionnaire was distributed. The 25 participants consisted of 16 males and 9 females aged between 19 and 27, mostly 20-22. All of them had formal instructions in English in their home country. They all had high school education in China, and one of

them has earned his bachelor's degree. In terms of language level, all participants were classified by the Canadian university as lower-intermediate to high (there is no beginner class at this ESL program). Participants' residence length in Canada varied from 2-28 months, and was 10.8 months on average. The statistics were: 0-6 months: 5 students; 6-12 months: 10 students; 12-24 months: 25 students; over 24 months: 4 students. Residence length corresponded with amount of instruction in Canada, although not in the country of origin. The characters of the 25 students participated are generalized below:

Gender (M:F)	Age	Residence Length	ESL Level
16 : 9	19-27	2-28 months	intermediate-high

For the qualitative part of the study, sampling was based on convenience. I planned to have 6 informants. However, I finally interviewed 8 students. Six of them volunteered at the time the questionnaire was distributed. Two additional informants were later obtained as the interviews went on, and new questions unfolded. After several interviews, I found that all the volunteers have developed very positive attitudes and desire toward interaction with native speakers, though they did not necessarily have more interaction than others. Then I started to wonder: what about the non-volunteers? Someone who does not have a positive attitude might be someone who does not want to be interviewed, either. I communicated this thought to one of my informants who has been very enthusiastic and helpful with this study. The informant talked to a friend of his who was absent frequently from class, and tries to avoid any occasion to speak English, but his friend still did not want to be interviewed. So he encouraged another two friends

who had relatively little contact with native speakers and who did not volunteer in the first place to be interviewed. And this is why I got two more informants than originally planned.

Concerning quantitative data collected from the questionnaire, I applied the SPSS computer program to generate descriptive statistics. Concerning qualitative data obtained from the interviews, data analysis was a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data.

3.3 Introduction of the Informants

I have included here an introduction of the 8 informants to develop some sense about all participants, such as who they are, why they are here, what they plan for the future, etc. Also, the informants' background is helpful to understand the interview data later on.

Zhao is a 22-year-old male student. By the time of the interview, he has been in Canada for 6 months. Before this he had never been abroad, the same as the rest of the informants. In China, he went to a college far away from home, but those three years, he explained, were not anything like being independent at all; they were more like extended high school years. Thus, his visit to Canada is not only his first time to be abroad but also the first time for him to live independently. Arriving in Canada, Zhao spent some time in a college before he started with the ESL program at this university. He is quite satisfied with his experiences earlier in the college and now in ESL at university, and plans to get a bachelor's degree in Canada. He is courageous, spirited, and eloquent. In the questionnaire, he reported an average of 7-10 hours communication with native speakers

per week.

Fan is a 20-year-old female. She has been in Canada for 6 months. The high school she went to in China arranges to send students abroad to study. Her father has a friend running a clinic in St. John's, who could take care of Fan during her stay, so she came to this place instead of other options. In the past semester Fan did one course in economics. According to the university rules, ESL students have to achieve certain scores in language study in order to take courses at university level. As a matter of fact, this rule has kept some students out of the university for a long time and probably forever. Some students have been in ESL for over two years, but still have not been able to attend any of these courses. Compared to many other students who arrived at the same time or even earlier, Fan did a great job in meeting the requirement to take courses. She expected to stay four to five years in Canada in order to get a bachelor's degree, and she will then decide whether to stay longer or go back to China. Fan reported 3-6 hours communication with native speakers per week.

Song is a 27-year-old male. He is older than all other Chinese ESL students, and is the only one who has earned a bachelor's degree in China. He has been in Canada for 19 months. After his first arrival in Toronto, he found a college that does not require ESL language test scores and started an MBA program there. After staying in Toronto for a year, he moved to Newfoundland, and lived with a host family to have more access to English. As he remarked, "In order to learn English, this is a better place than Toronto. In Toronto you do not need to speak English at all, and you feel better if you can speak Cantonese." At first Song planned to get a master's degree in Canada after spending a year in ESL to improve his English, but now he feels that he had had enough, and is

incapable of further study. He would probably go back in half a year. Song reported 0-2 hours communication with native speakers per week.

Mao is a 19-year-old female. Mao and Fan are roommates and good friends. Like Fan, Mao came to Canada right after finishing high school, and she has been here for only 2 months. What makes her different is that she graduated from one of the foreign language schools, which are the few high schools in China that use English as the language of instruction for most subjects, and provide native English speakers as some teachers. Thus, Mao supposedly has a better start, at least in listening, speaking, and communication skills, than most of her Chinese. I could feel her confidence with the second language during conversation. She chose to study abroad because in this way she can pick up a major and the language at the same time. She came abroad also because she has a feeling that “western education really fits me,” and her parents were supportive. She has already planned for getting a master’s degree in Canada, though she has not yet started her undergraduate program. I felt that, in a certain way, her assurance regarding her future study echoed her confidence in her second language. Mao reported 3-6 hours communication with native speakers per week.

Liang is a 20-year-old male. Through a business agency that helps with all the documents and processes of going abroad, Liang came together with other seven or eight other students from his home area. He and his peers have been here for 7 months. They maintain pretty good relationships, and contact each other very often. In Liang’s case, study abroad is a backup plan for the very competitive *national college entrance examination (NCEE)* that he has to take in China. There previous GPA is not a factor; only scores on this exam can decide whether you will go to college or not. In other

words, no matter how well or how poorly you did in past years in high school, it is this final exam that will determine your future. Nowadays in China it is more common for some financially capable families to send their children to study abroad either before the NCEE (if they don't want their children to suffer from the preparation for the exam), or after the NCEE (if their children did not do well in it). Regardless of the beliefs held by parents and students about whether postsecondary education in western countries could be better, for some lucky students, study abroad is a backup plan in light of the pressure of NCEE. It provides them the opportunity that they cannot have in China to go to accredited universities, and learn something that they are not able to learn in their own country. Liang was very enthusiastic and helpful with this study. Actually he encouraged two of his friends who did not volunteer at first to be interviewed. Those two additional informants might be characterized as "non-volunteers," and add some richness to the interview sample. Liang planed to stay for five or six years to get his bachelor's degree in engineering. He reported 3-6 hours communication with native speakers per week.

Yu is a 21-year-old female. She has been in Canada for 6 months. She also aimed to get a bachelor's degree. She chose this place in Canada because it has relatively fewer Chinese so that she can pick up the language faster. Before our interview, we met on campus and had several chats. She told me about her family in Beijing, her friends and classmates who also came to study in Canada, their life in big cities, and her boyfriend who is a Canadian. She referred to herself as "very talkative," and I agreed with her. She would talk for hours if there was nothing at hand that she needed to do. Yu's boyfriend is an education major at the university. According to Yu, he is also very talkative. Yu probably is the only one in the ESL program who has a Canadian boyfriend or girlfriend.

Yu did one course in physics last semester, her first course in a foreign university, and she did well. Yu and Fan are the only two among the informants who have started to take courses at the university level. Yu reported about 5 hours communication with native speakers everyday, which is around 35 hours per week, the most among all 25 students who responded to the questionnaire, and one of the two who reported over 10 hours communication per week with native speakers.

Chen and Dong, both male and about 20 years old, are two additional informants that Liang helped to bring to the project. They asked to be interviewed together. They came from the same province in China and have been in Canada for 8 months. Chen's family just immigrated, but his parents have gone back to China to run their business. He has a one-and-half-year younger brother with him. Chen expected to stay in Canada for about five years to get his bachelor's degree like most other students. He missed China very much, because "the tempo of life is too slow in this place." According to Chen, their immigration is all for a better life back in China. Dong has very similar future plan to Chen's, except that like, other informants, he came alone and was not an immigrant. Respectively, they reported 0-2 and 3-6 hours communication with native speakers per week.

The characteristics of the 8 informants are generalized below:

Name	Zhao	Fan	Song	Mao	Liang	Yu	Chen	Dong
Gender	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	M
Age	22	20	27	19	20	21	20	20

Arrive	6	6	19	2	7	6	8	8
(month)								
NS-NNS	7-10	3-6	0-2	3-6	3-6	over	0-2	3-6
(hours/week)						30		
Degree	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research findings obtained through the questionnaire and interviews were grouped under the following topics:

- (1) Contact Length, Frequency, and Occasions;
- (2) Attitudes toward Interaction Overview;
- (3) Language as a Barrier and a Benefit;
- (4) Non-linguistic Benefits of Communicating with NS;
- (5) Problems with After-class Communication;
- (6) About Anxiety and Interaction Intensity;
- (7) Native Speakers' Attitudes/Social Support; and
- (8) Students' Suggestions and Wishes.

These considerations revealed relationship between language, affective, and social factors and the NS-NNS interaction.

4.1 Contact Length, Frequency, and Occasions

Being in Newfoundland, Canada, with the overwhelming majority of its residents (some 98%) speaking English as their sole mother tongue, ESL students are supposed to be surrounded by target language speakers after class. There are situations where they have to speak English and communicate with others, such as coming across teachers, classmates and friends who do not speak Chinese, getting things done at school or outside, going to a party or school activities, etc.

However, according to the findings from the questionnaire, most Chinese students in the ESL program only have minimal contact with native English speakers outside of their classroom. Among the 25 of those who responded to the questionnaire, 7 (28%) students have 0-2 hours' communication in average per week; 14 (56%) students have 3-6 hours; 2 (8%) students have 7-10 hours; and another 2 (8%) have more than 10 hours. Thus, outside of the classroom, 84 percent of the students spend less than 7 hours per week communicating with native speakers, which is less than one hour each day, and among them, one-third spend no more than 25 minutes every day. Also, during the interview, all eight informants said that, in terms of the quantity of communication, they were unsatisfied with the current situation, and expressed desire to have more contact with native speakers outside of the classroom in the future.

Basically the communication between students and native speakers occurred on the following occasions:

(a) Going shopping; getting things done in school or outside. In the questionnaire, 16 (64%) students assigned these as one of the most frequent occasions that they communicate with native speakers (they may choose more than one option, so the percentages do not add up to 100).

(b) Chatting with friends, conversation partner, host family/landlord, etc. Fifteen (60%) students chose this as one of the "most frequent".

(c) School activities. Only 3 (12%) students voted for this.

(d) Church or community events. 2 (8%) students chose this.

The first three occasions were mostly talked about during the interview. School activities covered not much frequency but the communication involved sometimes lasted longer.

Thus these three occasions are considered most relevant to students' life, and will be analyzed in detail.

4.1.1 Get Things Done:

Some communication situations are relaxing and pleasant, but others can initiate anxiety, and are less desired. For example, the most frequent occasion for interaction, to "get things done in school or outside", is actually not very enjoyable for most informants. Both Chen and Dong recounted that they exhibit considerable anxiety in such communications. Even before the conversation, they have started to worry that they could mess things up if they do not understand or speak well. Because they are concerned with things they are going to do and the results, they can hardly take it easy, and the fear of making mistakes is all the greater.

Another reason for the discomposure is described by Mao below:

I don't feel very easy when getting things done, though it's not as embarrassing as ordering meals. Because I just came to this school (3 months), and don't know much about anything, I'm kind of in a situation of blindness, and still have to learn everything in English, which makes me feel even more (insecure).

As mentioned earlier, Mao has had some communication experiences with native English speakers since high school. For this reason, she was not as "scared" to speak as many other students when they first came. In Mao's case, language itself is not quite the

problem, but it is the lack of knowledge about the new environment that makes her feel anxious.

Despite their discomfort or dislikes, everyone has to use English, and effectively interact with native speakers in order to get things done. As this unwanted practice goes on and on, some have even become quite comfortable with the interaction, such as Zhao:

(If I need to get something done,) I usually would go there in person. Who knows what's going to happen, like ask you to fill a form, etc. I prefer getting things done directly. Email or telephone may get you into trouble, so I'd rather talk to them face-to-face. After all, I've been here for seven months, and I've been much more used to all these. It's not very likely that I can't comprehend because of new words or they speak too fast, I roughly understand.

It seems that the old saying "practice makes perfect" really works. Meanwhile, as some informants pointed out, their foreignness can be identified from appearance, and therefore some NS may speak more slowly, clearly, and simply at first. Others may realize that the student is not proficient in English after a few interactions, and start "foreigner talk" afterward. Usually they will take time to explain and negotiate meaning with the students. Most informants described such interaction as "uncomfortable" and "nervous", but none of them have encountered real problems.

4.1.2 Casual Chats:

about during the hour. If you're finished with one topic, you have to reorganize your language and keep talking, maybe talk about something related. You feel it's an obligation, a task, and this kind of practice under pressure of responsibility is quite necessary. Otherwise if you come across someone and chat, once you don't have anything to say, okay, "see you", then you walk away, and you escape it.

During the interviews, I found that, for most students, conversation partners are their only "native speaker friends". Undoubtedly, this program has provided ESL students with great opportunities to form friendships with native speakers, and in a way to get integrated. But informants uniformly articulated the difficulty to make friends with NSs.

Good relationships with their landlord or host family can notably increase students' opportunities to interact with native speakers. In such contexts, students not only have a lot of communication with their landlord/host family, but also with relatives, friends, and neighbours of the family. Liang's landlord has three children, but all live on their own. Liang was very moved when his landlord and friends, a number of elderly people, took him to a restaurant and celebrated his birthday for him. Fan's landlord is a Chinese, but when they host a party, their guests are mostly Canadians, and Fan enjoyed chatting with NS at the party. Dong lived in a homestay for about seven months. He had little interaction with NSs at school, but he chatted frequently with his landlord, his landlord's boyfriend, and their neighbours. Recently he moved out, because his landlord was going to sell the house. Now Dong has much less interaction with native speakers.

However, living together does not necessarily suggest more communication. Song's interaction with his host family was limited to saying hello every morning and night, and at the dinner table. At first, he chose to live in homestay since he expected to have more contact with NS, but he actually spends little time with a host family. He felt somewhat preoccupied by school work, and on a daily basis he is not very active in communication. Living with native speakers, Song still had less than three hours' after class communication per week. Thus, the interaction between students and their host families is not guaranteed; it essentially depends on both parties' willingness to communicate and their schedules.

4.1.3 School Activities:

School activities are supposed to provide casual and pleasant environments for communication. For ESL students, they can be good opportunities to practice English and to get involved in school. As Yu described:

When I just came, my English wasn't good, but I felt very pleasant each time after going to the activity. Since you were meeting with strangers, you introduced yourself and stuff like that over and over again, and got a lot of practice in English. Then, when you got home, you were convinced that you've made a lot of new friends today, and this made you feel extremely happy. Being here for the first time, everything around you was so strange, but after you got to know some people you had a feeling of being connected with others, and won't feel so lonely.

All informants agreed to the point that every week there are various activities going on at school; the opportunities are great. But interestingly, according to the questionnaire and interviews, most students hardly went to any of these activities. A few had the feeling that they are ESL students and do not really “belong” to the university, so they are not expected to show up at the events. Some others went occasionally, but found it boring. For instance, Chen went to *Coffee Club* (an event organized by the International Student Association, which aims to bring international students together for chats) and some other activities several times. He felt that students went there for the sake of chat, but once finished with self-introduction and some general topics they did not have much to talk about. Sometimes even if they tried to talk about something, the conversation came to a dead end because of cultural difference and language barriers. For example, once he talked about the idea of “being filial toward parents” in Chinese culture, but did not know how to make this clear, and explain to others why it is important to the Chinese. Such problems made the conversation difficult and uninteresting.

Other times, students did not go simply because they “got lazy” and were not in the mood, but the problem is that it happened all the time. Since participation in these activities is voluntary, they did not feel as obliged to attend as they did to meet their conversation partners. They explained that in China, students are under “strict supervision” of teachers throughout elementary, junior high, and high school. They are used to all kinds of rules, and being regulated to follow the rules. Now they have choices to make about many things, but most of them lack the motivation and self-discipline to carry them out. Thus, some informants suggested that it would be helpful if in some way

someone could enforce their participation in activities. But at the same time they realized that in Canada, where freedom and choice are respected, such enforcement is not likely to happen, and everyone has to develop their own discipline.

Thus far, we have analyzed the basic occasions for contact between ESL students and native speakers outside of the classroom. Now we will look into their attitudes toward the interaction.

4.2 Attitudes toward Interaction Overview

In the questionnaire with 25 ESL students who came from China, I asked them to choose from one list of the positive features, and another list of the negative features of communication with native speakers according to their experiences. For each feature, there are seven items, and students were allowed to choose more than one. Finally, students were asked to choose one from five barriers that they considered most adverse to communication, and describe briefly how it worked for them.

In the list of positive features, there are following options:

- (1) It improves my listening, speaking English, and other language skills.
- (2) It increases my knowledge of local culture and society.
- (3) It gives me some useful information about life and school here.
- (4) It helps to overcome my anxiety in using English.
- (5) It helps me to make more friends.
- (6) It enables me to better integrate into the new environment and the country.
- (7) Other (please specify).

The results of frequency are shown in the table below:

Item No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Frequency	23	15	10	16	13	11	1
Percentage	92%	60%	40%	64%	52%	44%	4%

Table 3. Positive Features of Interaction

The one student who answered “other” specified that it also helped to enhance his self-confidence and motivation in learning the language. We see that the top three positive features of communication with native speakers are: improvement in language itself, easiness and/or confidence in using L2, and awareness of its culture and society.

In the list of negative features, the options were:

- (1) My English is not good enough to talk to native speakers.
- (2) I am rather anxious when speaking with native speakers.
- (3) We don't have much in common to talk about.
- (4) Not many native speakers are willing to talk to me.
- (5) It's hard to make friends with native speakers.
- (6) There aren't many opportunities to get to know and talk to native speakers.
- (7) Other (please specify).

The results of frequency are shown below:

Item No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Frequency	9	3	10	2	6	12	1
Percentage	36%	12%	40%	8%	24%	48%	4%

Table 4. Negative Features of Interaction

The student who answered “other” specified that she does not have enough vocabulary, but this may be placed under the first item, too. We see that the top three negative features of communication with native speakers are: limited opportunities, difficulty in finding conversation topics, and the language problem.

If we compare these two tables, it is not difficult to find that the accumulated frequency (89) of positive features are much greater than that of negative ones (43), which indicates that in general students’ attitudes toward interaction with native speakers are pretty positive. In particular, among the 25 students, 19 (76%) of them selected more positive features than negative ones, 5 (20%) selected an equal number of positive and negative features, and only 1 (4%) student had more negative features in her questionnaire.

Finally, in order to further reveal which one of the negative features was considered most adverse by the students, I asked, “What is the greatest barrier to your communication with native speakers outside of the classroom?” with following six options:

- (1) Language barriers.
- (2) Social and culture differences.
- (3) Psychological barriers (e.g. anxiety, timidity, etc.).
- (4) Lack of opportunity to interact with them.
- (5) Not many native speakers take the initiative or are willing to interact with foreign students.
- (6) Other (please indicate)

The results of frequency are shown in the table:

Item No.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Frequency,	14	7	6	9	6	0
Percentage	56%	28%	24%	36%	24%	0

Table 5. The Greatest Barriers for the Informants

We see that “language barrier” is the top answer, “lack of opportunity” being the second with a bit more frequency than the rest, and the other three options are almost equally chosen.

In the flowing sections, we will look at the informants’ personal experiences and perspectives of NS-NNS communication by digging into the interview data. Such information will help us to understand the role of interaction in the language learning and well-being of the ESL students in a new country, and also how those barriers have impeded their communication with native speakers.

4.3 Language as a Barrier and a Benefit

As mentioned, in the questionnaire the great majority (23 out of 25, 92%) felt that their language skills were improved during interaction, but meanwhile, second language ability was identified as one of the major barriers to communication with NS. Zhao is one of four students among the 25 who reported more than 7 hours’ after-class communication with NS per week. He still remembered how little communication he was able to have at first because of his language:

When I first came, my landlord went to the airport and picked me up. He

spoke very fast. The first week I stayed with him, I spoke ten sentences, and the only thing I could catch is, he called my name and asked me for dinner, so I went, but the other words I didn't understand at all. He didn't feel like speaking to me, as he figured out my English was so poor. When I spoke English he completely had no idea what I was talking about. At that time, when I spoke I just put some English words together but in the wrong order, the sentence structure is still Chinese. Sometimes I had to write notes in order to communicate.

The students perceived language proficiency as a barrier to communication with NSs. Specifically, they mentioned the problem of vocabulary and idiomatic expressions being most substantial. For example, Mao addressed how it has bothered her:

It's difficult when you want to articulate something but don't know how. I feel one thing is (because of) the vocabulary, and the other is expression. When you talk about something profound, like culture, you contemplate it in Chinese, but have to say in English, you have no idea what the words and precise expressions are... Also, native speakers use a lot of expressions that I can't use or don't even know.

The incomprehensible words and expressions in conversation often require native speakers to repeat, explain, give examples, substitute by synonyms, or write down for later consultation. Students felt that such interaction promoted language skills, and was

particularly helpful for picking up new words and expressions. Zhao said:

For example, last time someone was talking about something very fast, and used the word skyrocket. It made me wonder “how is population related with rockets?” After they explained, I finally understood that “skyrocket” means to rise rapidly.

You know, the English we learned in China never taught oral expressions, they were all very formal. The idioms I presently know were all picked up from conversations with others. If I don’t understand, I’ll ask, again and again till I remember. Things that are used daily, like “a piece of cake”, won’t take long to memorize. But still I know too little, the quantity is far, far away from enough.

Additionally, Fan emphasized that she wanted to learn the native pronunciation of English, and in this way she preferred interaction with native speakers to non-natives. She said, by talking with native speakers, she can listen to their pronunciation, and improve hers. Yu talked about one of her classmates, whose pronunciation was not good, but he liked talking with others and watching television. After one semester, Yu found that her friend’s spoken English had improved significantly, and also his pronunciation.

All students mentioned how communication with native speakers has helped them to improve English, mostly in fluency, vocabulary and expression, and for a few people in pronunciation, too. But none of them expressly acknowledged their improvement in

grammar as a benefit. Several students commented that grammar is very easy for Chinese students, as they have all learned it extensively in secondary school in China. Their written language is almost always better than spoken. For example, Zhao first came to Canada speaking ungrammatical and incomprehensible English, but his landlord was able to understand him when he wrote his ideas down on a piece of paper.

Many times, interaction with native speakers helped students to enlarge their vocabulary, but not always. In fact, since memory is selective and usually requires repetition, consciousness is also critical for vocabulary learning. For instance, Liang mentioned that once his conversation partner talked about car parts by drawing a picture and illustrating. But as those words are not frequently used, Liang was not very interested in memorizing them. Eventually none of the new words was retained.

To summarize, in our case of intermediate ESL students from China, interaction does play a role in enhancing linguistic outcomes, inherently in fluency, vocabulary and expression, and sometimes pronunciation. But progress is not guaranteed; it is frequently associated with the student's intention and awareness. During the interviews, informants did not say anything about grammar improvement due to interaction. Having addressed some of the linguistic outcomes of communication, now we are going to look at the non-linguistic outcomes.

4.4 Non-linguistic Benefits of Communicating with NSs

As revealed by the questionnaire, the top three positive features of communication with native speakers in this study are: improvement in the language, easiness and/or confidence with using L2, and awareness of its culture and society. We

have discussed the language benefit in detail, and we will investigate the other benefits.

4.4.1 Reduces Anxiety and Builds Confidence:

During communication with NSs, students may decide to stay away from interaction, frequently because they wish not to be embarrassed by communication difficulties, and occasionally because they are concerned with interpersonal skills (for example, is it an inappropriate situation to interrupt people and seek intensive interaction?). According to the informants, continuous interaction in the L2 did help to reduce the feeling of embarrassment and anxiety. Once they felt relaxed, they became more open to interaction. For example, Chen recounted two benefits of interaction: the first was about psychology—the more you interact, the less fearful you are; and the second was to improve spoken English. Similarly, Yu said that as she had more L2 contacts, she became bolder. And through the interaction she also realized that by and large native speakers are able to understand her, which made her feel even more relieved when speaking.

Fan recalled that 7 months ago, when she first came, she ordered meals by pointing to the menu board, and would order the combos only. She did not dare to order things one by one, because she was afraid to make mistakes, and afraid that people would not understand her. The interaction made her feel that she had “lost face”. But now she is okay with ordering, and instead of convenient combos, she orders what she really wants. I asked her how this change has happened. Is it because she can now speak English better? Fan explained:

The most important reason is, you've been here for quite some time, you went to the parties, and got to know more and more native speakers, you talked to them, and little by little you feel it's really unnecessary to be so timid in front of them.

For Fan, through repeated interaction with native speakers, she realized that there is no reason that she should feel fearful and hesitant to order foods that she really wants, or to do things she needs to, just because she cannot speak the L2 perfectly. Though she still has lots of problems with communication, now she has become more ready and willing to solve them through interaction.

Although transformation in mindset (or acculturation) was not listed among the positive features in the questionnaire, during the interview informants brought forth this issue and believed that it was a positive outcome of communication and was helpful to communication. Some changes, such as being more open and bold, and caring less about "losing face", were particularly beneficial to their L2 learning. According to Zhao, such changes might not be an immediate result of communication, but the contact with native speakers, or even those who had been here longer, would exert an imperceptible influence on one's thinking:

I feel that in this place the language environment is particularly good. Like when you are shopping in a super market or in the mall, you can keep asking questions if you're not sure about something, and they will explain again and again, once or five times, till you understand. So I don't know

what you're afraid of. At first, I was also afraid, because they explained, but I was still confused, and felt embarrassed to ask again. If you were in China, you would feel embarrassed if this happened, you always have that kind of thinking...most Chinese are too traditional, I feel once we alter this, we'll—anyway, many people change after they came here. I can't tell exactly what changes, like personality, behaviour, life style, sense of value, all can be very different. Say for example, my landlord (who is an early immigrant from China), his ideas sounded unimaginable and unacceptable to me when I first came, but now I've accepted them, and feel extremely comfortable to communicate with him. My perspective on life and sense of value also have changed.

By saying “most Chinese are too traditional”, Zhao meant that in our traditional culture, people always have a lot of worries about how others feel and think about them. And being self-conscious, people tend to be more passive rather than taking initiatives. When it comes to using L2, they may try to avoid making mistakes by taking no risks. Also, people are very easily embarrassed whenever they encounter problems in communication. Thus, being “too traditional” can do no good but may actually increase one's foreign language anxiety. Having stayed in Canada for some time, Zhao and several other informants felt that they are now more independent and adventurous in thinking and acting. Now they would adhere to their opinions and conduct more firmly, and care less about how other people may think of them. Before they came, none of them had expected such a change, but as they looked back, they felt happy about it. They

believed that it will make their stay and study in the foreign country both easier and more light-hearted.

As the informants described, the more practice they got in communication, the more comfortable they became with using L2. Meanwhile, as their language and feelings were improved through communication, they became more willing to interact. Just as Zhao described:

The more you speak, the more courageous you become, and the more you speak, the better words and sentence structures you'll be using. Then you have more confidence, and you attempt to communicate more constantly with people.

4.4.2 Improves Culture Awareness and Life Quality:

For students who are interested in foreign culture, they found that communication with native speakers can always increase their knowledge about Canadian culture and society. For example, Zhao was interested in Canadian history, Fan was interested in customs and culture, and Mao was interested in culture and language. They all appreciated their improvement in culture awareness along with that in language and easiness. They felt that, as their knowledge about Canada increased, they could better understand what native speakers were taking about, and it could be easier to find topics for conversation. They also felt that the communication was easier if NSs were interested in Chinese culture. However, for those informants who did not show much interest in cultural issues, they did not felt culture awareness a significant benefit.

In communication with NSs, students sometimes receive useful information or even help that could bring convenience to their living and study abroad. Usually the information was about some useful little things, such as the latest news, where to buy something, how to rent a house, what are the tenant's rights, etc. But since such information can also be obtained from non-natives who have been in Canada for a while, not many students felt the benefit was substantial. It was some actual help that made students feel they benefitted. For example, Mao wanted to keep practising piano, but there wasn't one in her place, so she asked the organizers of the Discussion Group for some ideas. They applied for a practice room for her at school. Another thing they helped about was to advocate for wireless network access for all ESL students, and succeeded. Indeed, the NS students did not just help ESL students to get what they wanted from the school, but actually performed all the applications and negotiation on their behalf. Informants felt that if such business were left to them they would not be able to handle it. They really appreciated that the Canadian students would represent them, talk to the school, and help them to apply their rights.

To summarize, benefits of communicating with NSs included: development in language and feelings, and improvement in knowledge and life quality. The benefits were interrelated, and they were not just communication outcomes. In fact, they also influenced students' desire to interact. As Mao remarked:

I feel if your English and knowledge about this place has been improved, your confidence level in your studies, and in life overall, will increase.

Take myself for example, when I just came here I was not very anxious

(in speaking English), but after all you came to a new environment, and you were in a state of mind to try every thing little by little. It's different from your present mood, when you've got familiar with things around you and try to do something. So I feel that, as I interact more with them (native speakers), my knowledge about this place is improving gradually, and I have more confidence in using English, and everyday life, too.

4.5 Problems with After-class Communication

We have mentioned earlier that in the questionnaire students named three top negative features of communication with native speakers, which are: limited opportunities, difficulty in finding conversation topics, and the language barrier. The language barrier is analyzed first. So here we shall look at the other two problems.

4.5.1 Limited Opportunities:

As revealed by the questionnaire and interviews, being in an English speaking area, the Chinese ESL students actually spent very limited time communicating with native speakers, and they wanted to change that. Informants said that since the majority of students in ESL were from China (in some classes all the students are Chinese), they usually talked in Chinese during breaks. Then after school, given the pressure of passing exams so as to take courses from the university, students spent a lot time by themselves doing homework and working on vocabulary. When they got home, it was late, and they still had to cook and eat. Even if some of them lived with a host family, they usually had little time together. Yet most of them share houses with other Chinese students, and when

they get home they will chat with roommates in Chinese.

Thus, informants raised the issue of “circle of acquaintances”. They felt that studying in the ESL department, and living with other Chinese, they have very few chances to get to know native speakers. Such a circle impeded their contact with other ethnic groups both in school and after, and thus the opportunities to use English. They also pointed out that there were few school activities that can really mix NNSs with NSs.

Taking courses with NS

Many students expected that, once going to the university, they might have more opportunities to get to know native speakers, and interact with them. By taking courses together, NSs and NNSs may have discussions, group projects, casual chats, and thus get to know each other. However, some informants’ experience of taking courses with NSs disproved such ideal thinking.

Last semester, Yu took a physics course from the university, where there were only three international students. Yu said, during the first week her boyfriend came with her to the class in case she had problems understanding, but everyone looked at them very curiously and strangely. Then later in the class, people would always look at her when she tried to respond to the teacher’s questions. Yu felt uncomfortable about being stared at, but she understood why it happened:

Maybe because they are very young, 18 or 19, they feel strange about foreigners. They’ve seen quite a few foreign students walking on campus, but not many of them have never had real contact with foreign students.

They're still shy and reserved (in front of us). Thus, we had class together, but had very little communication, after class we went different ways...I just had some communication with my lab partner when doing school exercises.

Yu felt that some of the young people did not value their opportunity to study, as they secretly repeated after the professor and laughed at his strong French accent instead of responding to questions actively. The way they laughed at the professor's accent might have made Yu feel extremely uncomfortable about her speaking up in class and being watched by others. As far as I know, it is common and natural that people will turn their head and look at the person who speaks up in a class, a meeting, or other kinds of crowds. People look because they want to know who is speaking, and it is also a way to show respect. I suppose that students would also look at the speaker in ESL classes. However, since Yu has learned that in this class people around her may laugh at someone, even the professor, for the way one speaks, it could be hard for her to take their curiosity and attention as natural and friendly. Indeed, Yu felt that the way they looked at her seemed to say that "Hey, you're a foreigner, did you really understand? Why are you showing off?" If there are feelings like these between the NSs and NNSs, for real or simply a misunderstanding, we will not expect much contact between them. And there was little communication between Yu and her classmates besides cooperating on lab work.

For ESL students who have not yet taken any course from the university, taking courses were expected to provide them more opportunities to interact with native

speakers. But due to limited understanding and poor communication between NSs and NNSs, there exist barriers beyond language that can prevent possibilities to be realized. Curiosity about one another may stimulate people's willingness to communicate, but it is not enough. At least one of them needs to put away the cautiousness to start the conversation, and break the boundary.

Living with NS

Other students hoped to increase their contact with native speakers by living with a host family or moving into a school dorm and sharing a suite with native speakers. For some of them, the communication with their host family had become a major after-class interaction with NSs. For example, Dong claimed that he was rather introverted, so that he did not talk much with unfamiliar people even in Chinese. He usually would not actively seek opportunities to speak English after school; sometimes he even tried to avoid them. But he enjoyed talking to his host family lady and her boyfriend, since they have got quite familiar with him, and they were very nice people. In this sense, living with native speakers has helped a lot to increase Dong's usage of English. However, as we mentioned earlier, there were also students like Song who lived with host family yet still had very little time speaking English after class. Song's original intention of living with a host family was also to have more contact with NSs, but seems that it did not work that way.

Mao, being here for three months and currently living with Chinese, felt that either at school or home she hardly had any native speakers around her to interact with. To change this she has planned to move into the dorm and live with NSs:

When I apply (for the dorm), I'll note that I want to live with three native speakers, because I hope to get involved by having more communication with them, and participating in more activities. If we live together, we can have more after-class communication, and they may bring me to the activities they go to, and introduce their friends to me. Then my circle will grow.

From students' different experiences of living with host families, we realize that living with NSs, the same as taking courses with them, cannot not guarantee interaction between NSs and NNSs. Both parties need to have the willingness, time, and even some nerve to break the silence and talk to each other. For Mao, having native speaker roommates was a great opportunity to "get involved", and it was really worth an attempt, but things might have turned out not as perfectly as she expected.

4.5.2 The Difficulty with Finding Topics:

Some informants suggested an ideal situation of communication: to find a native speaker who is familiar with you and willing to listen to you with patience, to speak and practice with. In such cases, the native speaker knows how much English you probably can understand and say. Your words may fail to express the meaning, but it does not matter. The native speaker will keep asking you, help you to find the word and expression, or correct your mistakes. However, such perfect situations are not often available, because most students did not really have native speaker friends that they were

familiar with. Almost all informants reported that, besides their conversation partner and host family/landlord, they did not have other NS friends, and some were not even sure the relationship was close enough. Zhao talked about how unfamiliarity could inhibit the communication with NSs:

Most times there were not too many words (between NSs and NNSs), because you still don't know each other well, and don't know if the native speakers are willing to listen to you. It's like, if some foreign students come to China, and speak Chinese with us: if they can speak Chinese fairly well, that's fine; or if we share some interests or hobbies, though they have difficulty in expressing themselves I still would like to listen to them. But if I'm not interested in the topic and also we communicate with a lot of difficulty, I wouldn't enjoy the conversation and keep talking.

Students said, with their landlord and at some parties, even if they got to know nice Canadians who were willing to communicate, they did not have ways to keep in touch and contact frequently. Because of physical distance, it was hard to maintain and develop friendship with NSs. And because the NSs and NNSs did not know each other well, they sometimes felt it difficult to find topics. Besides, some topics are full of social, cultural, and historical background, such as television programs, famous people, political issues, etc. Any explanation can be complicated and take very long. Such culture distance made it even harder to find the right topics.

However, the situation may be better if one or both interlocutors are very

articulate, even if they are unfamiliar with each other. Otherwise, they may have hard time coping with the long pauses. Being popular among friends, Liang compared his conversation partner with his friends':

My partner is very good. He's willing to talk. Sometimes he has to stop and apologize for talking too much...My friend's partner doesn't talk much. You know, as we have difficulty with the language, we are unable to be the major speaker. They have a lot of long pauses in their conversation. It's very uncomfortable.

In this way, students all hoped that their NS interlocutors would not only actively find topics for discussion, but would also be articulate and play a leading role in conversation. Then as NNSs, they do not need to work hard to keep up the flow, as Mao said:

I feel that to communicate is more demanding than to simply listen or speak, because in a moment we have to process and put together thoughts and expressions...When you communicate with native speakers, you have an expectation. You hope that once a topic is found, he/she would say more, and you don't have to say too much, because that would be easier for you. Like two people communicating in Chinese, if one of them is very talkative, he/she will lead the conversation. But when using English, which is not our native language, we have no competence to steer the

conversation. We always hope he/she can talk more.

Among all students, Yu spent the longest hours with NSs because of her boyfriend. She said that, when talking to other Chinese, she was always the one who did most of the talking and went from one topic to another almost without a pause, but when talking to her boyfriend or other NSs she listened most of the time. Sometimes she got so tired even of listening that she had to tell her boyfriend that she “can’t take more English.” She told me that talking English for a long time made her feel very tired, and she was tired not only in the brain but also the mouth. To pronounce English, she had to shape her mouth and move her tongue differently than when speaking Chinese, and doing it for long is not comfortable.

It sounds to me like the informants did not care that they cannot lead the conversation and play a major role in it. Instead, most times they were glad if they did not have to think and speak animatedly. Depending on students’ personalities, more introverted people might prefer to speak less, but outgoing learners also had such thoughts. By listening to the informants, we understand that to communicate in English is sometimes very demanding for the NNSs, mentally and physically. Therefore they expect that NSs, who are more capable in the language, would be more active during the conversation.

4.6 About Anxiety and Interaction Intensity

According to the questionnaire, the second greatest benefit of communication was to reduce foreign language anxiety. Although anxiety was not among the greatest barriers

of NS-NNS communication, all informants reported that they have experienced anxiety which impaired communication, particularly at the early stage. The general reasons for being anxious were: (1) the new environment made them feel strange and uneasy; (2) their English proficiency, particularly in communicative language skills, did not allow them to interact smoothly; (3) because of their Chinese culture background, students felt “shy” or afraid to “lose face” if they failed to communicate with others, and negotiation of meaning can unduly embarrass them.

These ESL students from China are mostly very young. Coming to Canada was the first time for all to leave their country, and for many it was even the first time to leave their parents. Thus, it is to be expected that they felt extremely insecure and anxious upon arrival. Yu recalled how she entered Canada and waited for the airplane in Vancouver when she first came:

When I came to the Customs at Vancouver airport...I was extremely fearful and nervous, and was speculating how to pronounce the name of the school...Being done with all the formalities, I made a phone call to my mom, and just kept crying. I felt so strange. Although there are many Chinese around in Vancouver, I still felt that people looked at me as a stranger.

All the Chinese students realized that others perceived their foreignness, or in other words they feel their own foreignness, because of their appearance without even speaking. This feeling of being a stranger and a foreigner is always present, but is likely

to make one feel upset and excessively nervous for only a short period of time upon first arrival. After a while, most students are able to live with this feeling peacefully. Several informants said that now they were pleased when sometimes native speakers identified them as Chinese and ask them about their country and culture.

The second and third reasons of being anxious are closely related. If the student is proficient in L2, he/she certainly does not have to suffer from constant communication difficulty and be embarrassed. If the student can accept the difficulty in using L2 as a natural learning step instead of something disgraceful, they are likely to be less self-conscious, so that they will not feel unduly embarrassed by interaction. As Yu recounted:

Some students are unwilling to interact with people, frequently because they fear making mistakes, and fear that people can't understand them...When I just came, I had the same problem. I went shopping and talked to people, maybe because of my incorrect pronunciation, they couldn't understand me. I felt so embarrassed that the next time I wanted to say anything I just kept it to myself and said nothing.

Thus, having problems with the L2 and being self-conscious at the same time may cause high levels of anxiety, and in turn, the anxiety may inhibit interactions. When students felt “shamed” and that they had “lost face” because of some communication difficulty, they were likely to pretend to understand, and try to avoid further interaction. Informants believed that it happened a lot to the students because of their Chinese cultural background. In addition, informants reported that they felt more relaxed and

comfortable to interact with other NNSs than with NSs. Since they were both L2 speakers, they felt psychologically more equal and able to ask and explain things. Also they understood each other's situation, and were very patient with one another.

There are some general reasons for being anxious, such as those we just looked at. But interviews revealed that in many cases anxiety is situational. Certain kinds of interaction can be more anxiety-producing than others. Zhao, who was talkative among peer students, described how he pretended to understand his teacher:

(After class, I went to ask him a question.) The teacher spoke pretty fast, but after he explained two times, I felt like I must get it though I didn't. So I answered 'yeah, yeah, right', and asked no more. Then, I brought the piece of paper he sketched to classmates and made the problem clear.

Zhao intentionally avoided further interaction with his teacher because he felt extremely embarrassed at being unable to understand after repeated explanations. He also said, "I dislike conversations about school work, taking courses, etc. If there are any, I would like to end them as soon as possible." He did not mind talking to teachers, but talking about school work always made him nervous. Yu also said that talking to professors made her very nervous:

I took a course from the university. Whenever I had a question about the assignment or something, I'd ask classmates first, and if they didn't know, then I had to go ask the professor. I was very nervous when talking to him.

I prepared the words in my mind, but when they came out, either they were in the wrong order or something was missing, and I was so disturbed.

Yu wanted very much and tried her best to speak properly in front of the professor, but such intentions did not help. Instead, her efforts may have made things worse. Several students mentioned that they did not feel very comfortable and at ease to talk to teachers; thus they would try to consult classmates, conversation partners, or other friends in order not to ask teachers questions.

Students talked about other situations that triggered anxiety. For example, Mao and Fan mentioned that ordering meals was extremely uncomfortable. Because of time pressure, people who work at the café often speak very fast and probably are in no mood for voluminous interaction. And like Zhao said earlier, “if they’re busy with something, and you are taking so much time and effort to speak, even if they don’t mind, you feel embarrassed.” Therefore, Mao only dared to order what she knew very well, like pizza.

Song recalled his uncomfortable experience going to the *Coffee Club*. That time he was the only Chinese there. Other international students spoke English pretty well but they had difficulty understanding him. They frequently asked him for verification and explanation. Song felt uncomfortable and never went again. Thus, even in informal situations and with L2 speakers like themselves, students can get very anxious because of intensive negotiation.

Many students felt more relaxed talking to older people than to people of their own age. Chen explained that emotionally he felt equal in front of young people, and

hoped to act appropriately and look smart among them. But older people were supposed to be tolerant and affectionate, just like grandparents. Being with them, Chen was “not as afraid of making mistakes”, and if he made mistakes, he would not feel embarrassed. This kind of comfort associated with the interlocutor’s age may be explained by the theory of evaluation anxiety.

So far, in terms of anxiety that relates to using L2, we see that generally students have higher level of anxiety during their early days in the new country; for individuals, certain communication situations are more uncomfortable than others; and whenever students feel anxious or anticipate an embarrassment, they are very likely to avoid the contact and withdraw from interaction.

However, L2 speakers are probably not alone in feeling embarrassed when communication problems occur. For native speakers, to admit that they do not understand what the non-native has said might be embarrassing as well, and they are also aware that to negotiate meaning might get them into trouble. Look at Song’s host family:

My landlord couple, what happens to them is sometimes they don’t understand, but they pretend to. Once I said something, the old lady nodded as if she understood, so the old man turned to ask his wife since he didn’t get it, but she was babbling there, so I said it again.

Thus, no matter what language people are speaking, first or second, they may feel embarrassed because of communication difficulties. Sometimes people decide to stay away from interaction to save face, as well as time and effort.

4.7 Native Speakers' Attitudes/Social Support

During the interview, several informants mentioned that they did not really care if the interlocutor was familiar or not, what mattered was the NS's willingness to interact with them. All informants said that NSs in this place are mostly very friendly. Compared to people in big cities, people here are warmer and show more willingness to communicate with foreigners. It is generally agreed that if one took the initiative and talked to NS, they would all answer with politeness and patience. For example, whenever students had a problem with shopping or finding a place and asked people for help, they found that the NSs were almost always very helpful. People would explain things to them nicely, and would repeat if they could not understand. Sometimes people would even take them to the place they wanted to go.

On the other hand, informants actually encountered very few NSs who would talk to them first, and they complained about the inadequate effort that NSs sometimes showed during interaction. For example, having been here for seven months, Zhao encountered only three strangers who initiated a conversation with him, and one of them was actually another NNS. But as a "chatty" person, Zhao probably initiated conversations with many more NSs than they did. Yu was one of the few informants who did not think that NSs are willing to communicate with her. Having the greatest amount of communication, Yu's response was a little surprising. She remarked on it:

No, I don't feel like this (most NSs are willing to communicate with me).

If you talk to them they won't disregard you, and their attitude is fine, but

usually they don't speak to you first. Besides, if you aren't finding topics, sometimes they won't try to find one and discuss with you. Examples are with those casual friends and classmates...also, many conversation partners are not very outgoing persons, and they don't know how to find topics, not very skilful. I suppose many of them still lack communication experiences with foreigners, and don't know what to talk about with people from other countries.

Informants expressed their hope for the NS to be more interactive, so that they may benefit from the feedback NSs provide, as Zhao said:

At first, he (conversation partner) would just listen to me. Then I told him that I hope he can also tell me something, and if I have any grammar mistakes or problematic sentences, he can correct me, otherwise I would think that they were all right. He agreed, and became better...I don't like the feeling of doing all the talking, and after I finish, people don't have much response. Then I don't know what to say next, and how to step down. Communication should be interactive.

Informants had different answers to the question "Do you feel that most native speakers are willing to communicate with you?" As I read through the data, I could see that perhaps students' answering either "Yes" or "No", and showing satisfaction and dissatisfaction at the same time is not really a contradiction. All these were because they

had different measures for “willing to communicate”. Some may think that being able to respond in an appropriate manner is good enough to pass, while others may think that native speakers have to show their “willingness” by initiating communications and actively contributing topics and feedbacks. Using different measures, students had different answers to the question. I understand that some people liked to focus on the merit, while others liked to emphasize the deficiency. But such tendencies do not imply that students did not see the other side of the mirror. Looking at the complete testimony that each of them provided, I found that all informants were generally satisfied with native speakers’ friendly attitudes, but sometimes they were not satisfied with the initiation and contribution that native speakers made to the communication.

Yet some informants felt that some NSs probably did not want to interact with someone who spoke limited English. For example, Song once asked a NS the direction in a tunnel. The NS told him, but Song did not get it at once. Then without further explanation, the NS went with him and brought him to the place, despite the fact that they were not going in the same direction. For the NS, he might have felt it was difficult to explain things to a nonproficient L2 user. Taking Song to the place could be easier and cause no mistake. But Song asked the NS for help because he thought he could practice some English this way. This experience made Song feel that some NSs are unwilling to interact with him because of his limited L2. The next time Song wanted to talk to a NS, he might give it a second thought.

The informants understood that university students were all very busy and hardly had time to chat with a stranger. Unless they have something to ask for, they would not initiate conversations with an NS, either. Some students felt that when both the NS and

NNS were free, and in a relaxed mood, both of them would be more likely to chat. Thus, there were more off-campus occasions, such as when waiting for a bus or taking a walk, where either the student or NS would start a conversation. Additionally, informants found that, compared to younger NSs, older people usually showed more interest in talking to them, and were more likely to start a conversation. Having spare time is a prerequisite, and it could be also true that older people usually have more understanding and sympathy for young students who had to leave their family and country for study.

4.8 Students' Suggestions and Wishes

At the end of the interview, I asked the informants to talk freely about their supplementary thoughts, suggestions, and hopes. The supplements are grouped under four titles, and I felt it would be more vivid to use more quotations in this part.

No. 1: Speak out, don't be afraid.

Most informants suggested that communication is a fast and good way to improve English. It runs in a circle that the more you speak, the better you can speak and feel about speaking, and then you want to speak more. As Zhao proposed:

Don't be afraid. First, you have to believe most people are friendly. Don't be afraid of foreigners (here refers to the Canadians). Actually they may make fun of you sometimes, but it's no big deal. Try your best to communicate with them. If you don't, no one's going to look for you and practice with you. In this place, everything depends on yourself. Unlike in

China where parents and teachers will go find you, here you can hide in your room forever, and no one will even make a phone call. You have to depend on yourself, and catch the opportunities. Like the speech I did in college, many classmates who were better than me didn't go, because I was drawn, but I did very well. So after that I made it clear to myself: even if there's little certainty, I would like to try. Even if I lose, there's nothing disgraceful. At the worst, I can later do something honourable to make up for it...so I feel there's no need to be afraid. Speak out if you have the ability, and speak out if you don't.

Liang used to think that because of culture differences, to communicate with other Asian non-native speakers would be easier than with Canadians. But after he and his conversation partner got familiar with each other, and started to play sports and hang out together, he found that they actually talked about a lot of things, things that he would discuss with his Chinese friends. So he finally came to the sense that we should not look at Canadians as "foreigners", and be emotionally distant or be afraid of them. Talk to them just as we talk to people from our own country.

Informants also gave me some negative cases that happened around them. For example, some of their friends have been here for months or even years, but were sort of living in isolation since they cannot overcome the fear of communication. They would go to places with Chinese friends, so that others can do the talking for them. But because they practice so little, they have made very little progress in English, and because they were so inactive, by and by they become remote to their Chinese friends who are active

in communication. Many of these students had no contact with native speakers at all, and had fewer and fewer contacts with their Chinese friends. They have not done well in class, and felt unusually lonely. After months in Canada, some went back to China without going to college, while others were still struggling in ESL. In such extreme cases, the resistance to communication has hurt the students not only in language learning, but above all in their well-being in the new environment.

No. 2: Make school activities “mixed” and more meaningful.

Some informants reflected that there were not many school activities that really helped to improve the communication between Canadian students and international students. Mao said:

I feel that the school did not organize enough activities for the communication between native speakers and us. Every week there’s a lot of activity flyers posted in ESL, but most of them are for international students. There’s only *Conversation Partner* and *Discussion Group* that are for such communication. I feel that there should be more activities like these going on.

Mao’s roommate Fan suggested:

I hope the school can have more activities that would integrate international students with Canadian students even more. Some of the

activities we now have are simply singing, drinking, or play a few games. They are either too noisy, or the Canadians play together, and the Chinese together. I hope we can have some activities that group Canadian and international students together and let them sit at a table to do things together.

Chen and Dong advised that the international activities should also be more task-oriented and thus more meaningful. They felt that it is not easy to find topics for free chat, and sometimes people get tired after chatting with a stranger for a while. But if they have a task at hand, have a goal to accomplish, they naturally have something to discuss, and will not be bored.

No. 3: Speaking class should be more practical.

Overall, informants were satisfied with their ESL class and materials. Most of them thought the content was interesting, and the teachers are very good. Only Yu talked about her dissatisfaction about the speaking class she had:

I feel that speaking class should be centered on communication, but this class was more about pronunciation. Yes, pronunciation should be corrected, but do you know what? It taught phonetic symbols (which is taught at the beginning level in China) and how to pronounce words. Later it got better, we were asked to record our voices on tape, and they were corrected by the teacher. I thought that was a good thing to do. But after

this, I felt it was whiling away the time. We were given a piece of paper, on which there were simple words and phonetic symbols, like *pen*, *pencil*, and asked to tell them apart. Very few people make mistakes on such easy words. The speaking class didn't tell you how to communicate with the outside world. It only taught you the minor issues and details of communication. They were not helpful to overall improvement. So I was pretty disappointed at this class.

Students experienced some difficulty because of mispronunciation or accent, but they felt that generally NSs can understand them. What bothered them most were unfamiliar oral expressions and limited vocabulary. Yu thought a reference book used in class was helpful, where there were many oral expressions, “made-up” words in spoken language. But only the teacher had the book; students had no access to it after class. Yu hoped the speaking class would be refocused and would go further than phonetics in order to be really conducive to daily communication.

No. 4: Lower the bar of taking courses in university.

Yu took a course at the university last semester, and Zhao did one in college before he came to the ESL program. Both of them referred to such an experience as very helpful to improve language, and also to get some learning tips in a foreign institute. Yu said:

During the semester, I have ESL and one course. It's a bit heavier. The

(course) content is not difficult. Language is the chief problem...I feel my listening has improved rapidly. If I know most of the words, even if people speak fast, and with some accent, I can basically understand. Taking the course, though I don't have much contact with the teacher or classmates, is still very different from ESL. In the ESL program, teachers always speak extremely clearly and slowly so that we can understand. But actually, most teachers in university don't talk that way. Like the teacher I had, he's a Francophone and speaks fast. His pronunciation is very unclear, and he has many spelling mistakes in his PowerPoint. So I have to seriously preview before each class to know everything he says and writes.

When Zhao went to the college and took a course there, his English was probably much inferior to Yu's, as he was completely lost at first. But he finally managed by working hard, and felt it has benefited him a great deal:

I did a course named *organizational behaviour* in college. It was the first course I ever took with a pure English-speaking teacher and textbook. The first two classes, it was like listening to a sealed book. The teacher talked on and on in a flow of eloquence. But trying to locate what he was saying in the book was impossible since he was not reading from the book: the book was for us to read. Note-taking also depended on the students themselves. After two classes, I only had a title *Lesson 1* in my notebook,

nothing else. Then I became very worried; I definitely wouldn't be able to pass like this. So I went back and exerted the utmost strength to look up words in the dictionary. I remember clearly that, on the first page new words accounted for 70%; it was marked like hundreds of ants creeping on paper. Well, this was only the first page, the *Introduction*, and I've looked up for so many words. I thought: I am going to fail. I was scared, but others (also Chinese students) who had taken the course told me, "It doesn't matter if you can't understand the lecture, but you must pay attention to the preview; and after class, borrow your classmates' notebook to copy and recite." In this way, I practised little by little...In every subject, there can't be new vocabulary all the time; after some time, words start to repeat themselves, and that helps memorizing. Also, many academic words are used throughout subjects. Much of my present vocabulary actually came from that course, and I've never forgotten them...Doing this course was extremely helpful to me. It taught me how to study in a foreign country, which I had never experienced in China.

By the time of their interviews, Chen and Dong had not been able to take courses. They expressed how they felt about it:

Now in the ESL program we are learning English all the time, in class or after, and only English. When we went to school in China, we had many subjects. They can be something you like, or you don't, but anyway there

is some variety. Learning English all day long makes us feel dull. So we hope that, in English, we can learn some other subjects, like maths, physics, and chemistry. But eventually, we have to pass the language exam.

(I asked: Do you have confidence in taking courses now?)

Yes, if it's just one course. And they say these science subjects are easier than those in China; at least the content should not be a problem. Reading and listening are not very difficult, either. The difficult probably will be writing papers.

Taking courses embodies content-based language teaching. It was beneficial in terms of improving second language, adapting to a new teaching mode, and adding some colours to language learning. Because of language deficiencies, taking courses can be a great challenge to ESL students. However, the pressure of failing a course would push them to work harder than ever. However, in the ESL program you can stay forever till you pass the exam. Zhao's experience just demonstrated that given an opportunity how much potential one may fulfill.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This study set out to investigate in a natural setting the linguistic as well as non-linguistic outcomes of L2 learners' interaction with native speakers. Theoretically, it integrated the socio-educational model into present NS-NNS interaction research, and thus added an affective and social dimension to interaction. My major concerns throughout the study were:

- As indicated in the literature, interaction can play an important role in language acquisition; communication is also affectively and socially bound. Then, what did the Chinese ESL students get from their interaction with NSs in Canada?
- How would such communication outcomes (linguistic and non-linguistic) possibly influence the L2 learners' life and study in the new country?
- What can the L2 learners, school, and native speakers do in order to improve such communication?

Discussions and conclusion to these issues are presented as follows:

1. The linguistic outcomes of communication.

It is observed that during communication both learners and interlocutors can modify their sounds, structures, and vocabulary toward greater comprehensibility. By proposing that interaction as a process not only emphasises communication of message

meaning, but also provides an opportunity to focus on message form, some researchers thus argued that interaction has a powerful role in L2 learning (e.g. Pica, 1994). However, others doubted that interaction will *lead to* acquisition, questioning whether learners develop their interlanguage system through interaction.

In this study, the linguistic benefit of communicating with NSs is most obvious in fluency, vocabulary and expression, and sometimes pronunciation. First, there is no doubt about fluency since “practice makes perfect.” Second, during communication, students were exposed to new words and expressions; then, through interaction those words and expressions made sense, and some of them were memorized. Third, for those students who cared about pronunciation, they could also pay attention to the difference between native speakers’ tongue and theirs. But except for fluency, the other two benefits are frequently associated with the student’s intention and awareness, and thus are situational and selective. Finally, the linguistic outcomes help to improve the quality of communication at later times.

Note that most of these intermediate ESL students from China had completed high school before their arrival. Through years of formal education, they have learned English grammar systematically. Regardless of the fact that the students’ perceived competence in grammar is relatively high, they still make mistakes in writing and conversation constantly. There are some rules that have not been internalized in their brains, and rules that they do not know about, but none of the informants felt that their grammar knowledge was improved through interaction, or at least the growth is too minor to be realized. This finding seems to support the argument that when learners communicate in L2, they fail to notice non-target-like features in their interlanguage

unless it is indicated to them explicitly (e.g. Schmidt & Frota, 1986). So far, it is true with this particular group of learners, who are at intermediate ESL level and have learned explicit language rules in their home country. Therefore, from the language perspective, results from the present study once again cast doubt on the proposal that interaction leads to acquisition.

2. The non-linguistic outcomes of communication.

In his socio-educational model of second language acquisition, Gardner (1985) postulates that language learning is a dynamic process in which some affective variables influence language achievement, and conversely the achievement and experiences of learning the language can have an effect on affective variables. The model directs our attention toward affective variables that will influence language achievement, and it makes clear that there are both linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes associated with language programs and learning activities. Inspired by this idea, in addition to the linguistic outcomes of interaction, I also inspected the relationship between affective variables and NS-NNS interaction in a natural setting. The affective variables examined were anxiety, confidence, and motivation.

In this study it was found that: (1) as students linguistically benefited from communication, they had more confidence and less anxiety in using L2; (2) Through communication, the students' knowledge and information about the new environment were increased, and this helped to reduce anxiety and gain confidence, too; (3) Through interaction, some students realized that, regardless of their incorrect pronunciation and sentence structure, in most cases the NSs would still be able to understand them. So they

became more comfortable with using L2; (4) As an imperceptible result of communication, students may experience some transformation in mindset, such as how they look at “losing face” and embarrassment. Acculturation in these senses allowed them to become bolder and more adventurous when using L2 as well as dealing with other situations; (5) Whenever students felt less anxious and more confident, they showed more willingness to communicate, and take more opportunities to interact with NSs.

The interview data upheld the recommendation that a situation perspective is the best approach to study foreign language anxiety. As can be predicted by the socio-educational model, L2 anxiety and confidence considerably influenced students’ interaction with NSs, and conversely, interaction with NSs may gradually modify students’ general anxiety and confidence level. There was a dynamic relationship between anxiety/confidence and interaction.

Gardner (1985) proposed three measures to be used to assess learner motivation, which are: attitudes toward the L2, its speakers, and the learning situations; the desire to learn; and intensity/effort extended in learning. Empirical studies that test the socio-educational model have supported the role of motivation by identifying a constant correlation between motivation and achievement in classroom environment.

In this study, I found that most students maintained quite positive attitudes toward communication with NSs. Such positive attitudes were demonstrated by their acknowledgement of the associated benefits, and desire to have more contact with NSs. Either in the questionnaire or interview, the majority of students agreed on and talked more about the benefits of interaction than the dislikes. Even some informants who had

the least contact with NSs felt and believed such interaction can do much good to them. Students probably formed a positive image about study abroad before they came; otherwise they would not have been here. However, I noticed that students who had more communication with NSs were able to give me more examples to illustrate the benefits than students who had less. Therefore, the positive attitude formed through life experience was more concrete, and probably stronger, too.

In terms of desire, all informants exhibited considerable desire for having more contact with native speakers: to communicate, socialize, and integrate with them. Many of them went to activities, and socialized with NSs with a strong learning motive. They also wished to better integrate by making friends with NSs, particularly after getting rather comfortable with using L2. As a student said:

I met some Chinese PhD students. Some of them have been here for many years. They do excellently in their major, and have no problem with everyday life, but they seem to have little understanding about the culture and people here. They seldom contact people outside the Chinese circle. If they go back to China, they'll just bring back with them their specialty, but look as if they've never lived abroad for real. I feel that once being abroad, life and study should supplement each other, and communication with native speakers is important. I really don't want to be like them.

Once language became an insignificant problem, these young people were no longer content with just being able to communicate. They had plans for doing their

bachelor's and even master's in Canada, which would take years. So they wish that by socializing with NSs, they can integrate into the society, and have a better life living abroad. However, students' desire for interaction may not be consistent. Many times it depends on the situation and NSs' attitudes.

In my study, however, I found that there was frequently a huge gap between students' attitude toward/desire for communication and their interaction intensity. Several informants expressed their acknowledgement of communication benefits and their wish to have more contact with NSs, but meantime admitted that they actually paid little effort to such activities, sometimes even intentionally trying to avoid them. The reasons for such discrepancy can be: language barriers, limited opportunities, weak social support from some NSs, and students' lack of self-discipline. For such reasons, students may find it hard to have an interlocutor, and even harder to find an interactive, cooperative NS to communicate with. Once the conversation is started, difficulties with the language and topic are expected. And sometimes students just need some get-up-and-go. Similarly, students displayed inconsistent communication intensity when provided with different situations and interlocutors.

Assessed by all three standards (attitude, desire, and intensity), I found that informants with higher learning motivation spent more time communicating with NSs. They tended to create more opportunities to interact with NSs by taking more initiative, participating more activities, and being more active in the conversation. Meantime, students confirmed that, through contact with NSs, their language was improved and personal experiences enriched, which motivated them to further interact.

Therefore, as Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) argued, "motivation influences

language achievement, and language achievement as well as experiences in formal and informal language contexts influence attitudes and motivation” (p. 2). Research findings obtained through present study have indicated that the effect between affective variables and after-class interaction is reciprocal.

3. Interaction is socially bounded.

It was proposed that the intention to act will determine the behaviour itself. There are two factors that decide one’s intention to practice, which are the individual’s attitudes toward the behaviour and subjective norms of the society (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The importance of subjective norms has been confirmed by studies that considered both contextual and individual difference variables in L2 use (e.g. Clément, Baker, & MacIntyre, 2003). In this vein, researchers pointed out that it is necessary to have an interlocutor for authentic communication. Even in situations where the learner is well surrounded by speakers of the target language, social support is critical and cannot be taken for granted (Noels, 2001). And Norton (2000) criticized the premise that the language learner’s access to L2 is a function of individual motivation.

At this point, the theory of individual attitudes and subjective norms sheds a light on how to understand the gap between students’ attitudes/desire and their interaction intensity found in my study. My data suggested that, because of subjective norms and significant others, students were not always able to turn their positive attitudes into practice, and thus there was a gap between consciousness and behaviour.

In my study, I found that to some extent the informants were able to choose whether they would interact with NSs, where individual differences and motivation

played a role in their access to L2. But except for the woman who had a Canadian boyfriend and reported over 30 hours per week communicating with NSs, the rest of the informants all had below 10 hours, though their personality or intensity varied a lot. The idea of social support probably provided us with a good explanation, as Norton suggested that learners' access to and use of L2 is not simply a function of their motivation. Similarly to Norton, I found that students' anxiety, self-confidence, and motivation (especially intensity) were not consistent given different situations and interlocutors. Such results complimented the critical perspective which argues that a language learner's affective filter is not an inherent trait, but one that is socially constructed with and by the lived experiences of language learners (Norton, 2000).

Using the concept of locus of control for interpretation, I felt that the informants were generally objective and self-reflective. They pointed out the barriers that inhibited their communication, and they also emphasized the importance of individual effort. Several informants reflected that they did not try hard enough. And most of them believed that since NS-NNS communication is primarily in the interest of the learner, it is their responsibility to seek for the opportunities and act spiritedly in the conversation. Thus, the majority students expressed overall satisfaction with social support, though they said that few NSs would take the initiation to talk to them, and many NSs were not very interactive.

4. Take steps to improve NS-NNS interaction.

At the end of Chapter 4, a report was made on informants' suggestions about NS-NNS interaction, such as the NNSs be more courageous, the NSs be more interactive, and

that the school might improve its activities and speaking classes, and reconsider the standards of taking university level courses. Upon these students' suggestions and my research findings, I would like to discuss school activities in greater detail.

School activities have the advantage of being able to bring together students from different departments and living in different places. Once students get to know others, they may see each other around on campus and at other activities again. Besides, to arrange spending time together with people at your school can be easier than with those from outside. Unfortunately, at school activities the opportunities to communicate apparently existed, but not many of them were realized. As revealed by the questionnaire, only 3 (12%) students among 25 thought these were one of the most frequent occasions where they communicated with Nss.

Problems with participation can be various. First of all, due to cultural reasons, there are some activities whose participants are mainly NSs, such as many clubs and religious groups. These activities either cannot attract ESL students, or students may feel that they are not specially for "internationals" and thus hesitate to go. Meanwhile, there are other activities whose participants are generally international students, like those organized by the International Student Association (ISA). In the same way, these activities either fail to attract native students, or they may feel that those are for "internationals" but not them. Therefore, Canadian and international students may have all different activities to attend, though no one has ever said that they are not supposed to go to alternative activities.

The second problem is that at some events where there are both NSs and NNSs, for most of the time people would still chat with their friends and acquaintances. As a

result, NSs usually chatted with NSs, and NNSs with NNSs. So it was like in a melting pot; there were still chunks. Both NSs and NNSs felt awkward about going into other groups and initiating a conversation with some one unknown. Such an unexpected visit might be welcome, but very few people would like to try.

The third problem is that many conversational activities students have been to were not meaningful. Each time students went they started with some conventional topics but could hardly get deeper. They always had difficulty coming up with suitable new topics. For this reason, many felt bored after going there several times, and some never go again. And it is also a problem with NNS-NNS communication.

The forth problem is with the students' determination, which has been discussed earlier. Most Chinese ESL students are very young, and before they came to Canada were under the close watch and administration of teachers and parents. Now facing so many activities in school and given the choice to participate, some of them felt lost and lacked the determination and self-discipline to go continuously. Besides social support, this can be another reason why some students had very positive attitudes toward and desire for interaction but demonstrated little intensity.

Recognizing problems that may hamper school activities from becoming excellent opportunities for L2 learners to interact and integrate, I make the following suggestions: organizations for intercultural communication purposes may be established; the school may organize more activities whose themes are generally attractive across cultures; the activities organized by ISA may be redefined to encourage NS students to participate; conversation can be made more meaningful by introducing tasks into activities; NS students can be mixed with NNSs when sitting or grouping, e.g. by

drawing straws; ESL students' participation can be encouraged in all kinds of school activities by giving them extra credit in class or to take certain courses; having students talk about their experiences and gains in the activities in speaking class; having students write about their experiences of participating in certain school events, such as International Week, as writing assignments; having students do presentations that relate to school activities.

Summary

This study, conducted with intermediate ESL students from China, aimed to examine the outcomes of NS-NNS interaction in a natural setting. As demonstrated in the socio-educational model, my research findings indicated that interaction with NSs has both linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes for the learner. Affective variables influence interaction, and communication experiences also have an effect on affective variables. However, the affective variables such as anxiety and motivation are frequently situational rather than habitual. Also they need to be understood in relation to the target language speakers. Therefore, I think it is reasonable and beneficial to incorporate both the affective and social dimensions into the study of interaction, and the non-linguistic outcomes of communication deserve more attention from researchers.

One limitation of the study is that, due to time constraints, I was able to carry out only one interview with each informant. Though some interviews lasted up to 3 hours, I feel that repeated interviews would be valuable, and it can be extremely informative to track the students over months to find out their changes in language, anxiety, attitude, intensity, etc. Based on the finding that there is usually a significant gap between

students' attitude/desire and their communication intensity, further study could be done to explore approaches that may sponsor students' intensity, taking into account the cultural and educational background of the learner.

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APPENDIX 1

Cover Letter and Questionnaire (the English translation)

Dear Fellow Students,

You are invited to participate in my research project. I am a graduate student studying Second Language Teaching and Learning here at MUN, and my name is Guang Xu. My project is designed to explore the experiences and attitudes that our Chinese originated ESL students have concerning communication with native speakers outside of the classroom. This study may last 50 days or so in March and April 2005. All ESL students at MUN who originally came from China, and have an English level of intermediate or higher are invited to participate. This study will be conducted by myself under the supervision of Dr. Barbara Burnaby. The information provided by you will eventually help to comprise my master's thesis.

At the early stage of this study, I will ask you to fill out a short questionnaire about your general experiences and attitudes toward your interaction with native English speakers. The questionnaire will probably take you less than 10 minutes to finish. Later, based on the clues revealed by questionnaires, I am going to conduct follow-on interviews with six individual students to gain in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. The interviews may take 1-2 hours each, and we may want to schedule a second interview. This will be discussed with you and scheduled at your convenience. Both the questionnaire and the interview will be administered in

our native language, Chinese, but English translation will be provided by me to report findings.

Your participation in the study is significant and beneficial in many ways. First of all, your experiences and perspectives as a second language learner living and studying abroad are crucial to understanding the problems of ESL learning. Secondly, ESL teachers can adapt their class content and activities to reflect the real-world communication needs according to your data. Thirdly, school administrators may be concerned with the barriers, if any, that you have encountered when you interact with the native speakers. Such concern can later be turned into facilities and activities that promote intercultural communication and multicultural awareness in the school. Thus, by talking about your own experiences and opinions, you can make a contribution to improve foreign students' language learning environment, their participation in the school community, and enjoyable living in a new country. However, participation in the study may also bring you some inconveniences. For example, it will take your valuable time to fill out the questionnaire; interviews can be particularly time-consuming; having you talk about the problems you had when you interact with native speakers may make you feel uncomfortable, etc.

Although everyone is strongly encouraged to participate, participation in the study is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. All information obtained from you in this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. By using anonymous questionnaires and pseudonyms for all places and interviewees, I will protect you and this university from being identified. Collected data will be stored in a safely locked case and will be destroyed after five years. Results from the study will be available to every participant upon

request. If you have any question about this study or your participation in it, please call me at 753-6127 or E-mail me at guang.xu@gmail.com. You also may contact my supervisor Dr. Barbara Burnaby at bburnaby@mun.ca. The proposal for this research has been approved by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research at Memorial University. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 737-8368.

Thank you very much for your time and interest!

Guang Xu

Your completion and return of this questionnaire indicates your willingness to participate in the study (not including further interviews) and your consent to use the information as described.

General Information:

Age: _____; Gender: _____; ESL level: _____

Length of stay in an English speaking country or region: _____ months

Questions:

1. In which of the following occasions do you MOST OFTEN communicate with native English speakers outside of the classroom? (You may choose more than one)

(1) Chat with friends.

(2) Go shopping; get things done in school or outside.

(3) School activities.

(4) Church or community events.

(5) Other (please indicate) _____

2. On average and per week, how many hours in total do you spend in communicating with native

English speakers outside of the classroom?

- (1) 0-2 hours.
- (2) 3-6 hours.
- (3) 7-10 hours.
- (4) More than 10 hours, which is _____ hours (please specify).

3. According to your experiences, what are the positive features of communication with native English speakers? (You may choose and add more than one)

- (1) It improves my listening, speaking English, and other language skills.
- (2) It increases my knowledge of local culture and society.
- (3) It gives me some useful information about life and school here.
- (4) It helps to overcome my anxiety in using English.
- (5) It helps me to make more friends.
- (6) It enables me to better integrate into the new environment and the country.
- (7) Other (please specify) _____

4. According to your experiences, what are the negative features of communication with native English speakers? (You may choose and add more than one)

- (1) My English is not good enough to talk to native speakers.
- (2) I am rather anxious when speaking with native speakers.
- (3) We don't have much in common to talk about.
- (4) Not many native speakers are willing to talk to me.
- (5) It's hard to make friends with native speakers.
- (6) There aren't many opportunities to get to know native speakers and talk to them.
- (7) Other (please specify) _____

5. What is the greatest barrier to your communication with native speakers outside of classroom?

- (1) Language barriers.

- (2) Social and culture barriers.
- (3) Psychological barriers.
- (4) Lack of opportunity to interact with them.
- (5) Not many native speakers take the initiative or are willing to interact with foreign students.
- (6) Other (please indicate) _____

6. Please briefly describe how this greatest barrier has impeded your communication:

Thanks! If you would like to participate in later interviews, please leave contact information:

APPENDIX 2

Consent Form (the English translation)

Dear Friend,

You are invited to participate in my research project. I am a graduate student studying Second Language Teaching and Learning here at MUN, and my name is Guang Xu. My project is designed to explore the experiences and attitudes that our Chinese originated ESL students have concerning communication with native speakers outside of the classroom. This study may last 50 days or so in March and April 2005. All ESL students at MUN who originally came from China, and have an English level of intermediate or higher are invited to participate. This study will be conducted by myself under the supervision of Dr. Barbara Burnaby. The information provided by you will eventually help to comprise my master's thesis.

At the early stage of this study, I have asked you to fill out a short questionnaire about

your general experiences and attitudes toward your interaction with native English speakers. Now, based on the clues revealed by the questionnaire, I am going to conduct follow-on interviews with six individual students to gain in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Each interview may take 1-2 hours, and we may decide to have a second interview. All interviews will be administered in our native language, Chinese, but I will later provide English translations to report findings. If you consent, interviews will be audiotaped for the convenience of data analysis.

Your participation in the study is significant and beneficial in many ways. First of all, your experiences and perspectives as a second language learner living and studying abroad are crucial to understand the problems of second language learning. Secondly, ESL teachers can adapt their class content and activities to reflect the real-world communication needs according to your opinions. Thirdly, school administrators may be concerned with the barriers, if any, that you have encountered when you interact with the native speakers. Such concern can later be turned into facilities and activities that promote intercultural communication and multicultural awareness in the school. Thus, by talking about your own experiences and opinions, you make a contribution to improving foreign students' language learning environment, their participation in the community, and enjoyable living in a new country. However, participation in the study may also bring you some inconveniences. For example, it has taken you some time to fill out the questionnaire, but the interviews can be particularly time-consuming; having you talk about the problems you had when you interact with native speakers may make you feel uncomfortable, etc.

Participation in the study is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. All information obtained from you in this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. By using pseudonyms for all places and interviewees, I will protect you and this university from being identified. Collected data will be stored in a safely locked case and will be destroyed after five years. Results from the study will be available to every participant upon request. If you have any questions about this study or your participation in it, please call me

at 753-6127 or E-mail me at guang.xu@gmail.com. You also may contact my supervisor Dr. Barbara Burnaby at bburnaby@mun.ca. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact our school ethic committee at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 737-8368.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided on this form, it has been explained to you, you have been offered a copy of this form to keep, you have been given an opportunity to ask questions about this form and the project, your questions have been answered, and you agree to participate in this study. Thank you for your assistance with this project!

If you give consent to participation, please sign: _____ **Date:** _____

If you give consent to audiotape, please sign: _____ **Date:** _____

APPENDIX 3

Semi-Structured Participant Interview (the English translation)

A. General background

Which part of China are you from?

What made you come here?

How long have you been in Canada?

How long will you stay?

B. Experiences communicating with native English speakers

Can you describe the situations when you communicate with native English speakers outside of the classroom?

Can you think of some situations where you enjoyed talking to native speakers?

Can you think of some situations where you felt uncomfortable talking to them?

Considering the role you play in conversations, do you feel it different to talk to native English speakers?

C. Attitudes toward communication with native speakers

According to your experiences, are there any advantages of communication with native English speakers?

Are there any disadvantages of such communication?

Evaluating the advantages and disadvantages, do you think such communication is important or unimportant?

In general, how do you like your experiences talking to native English speakers?

D. Effort to communicate

Do you try to participate in some activities so that you can communicate with native speakers? What do you think of these programs or activities?

In your daily life, do you take the initiative to communicate with native speakers?

Why/Why not? In what situations you would do so?

E. Desire to communicate

Are you willing to talk to native English speakers or do you try to avoid such occasions?

Is there any difference when your interlocutor is a friend, acquaintance, stranger, a student, a professor, etc.?

Do you want to have more communication with native English speakers outside of the classroom?

F. Social support, difficulties, and satisfaction

Do you feel most native speakers are willing to talk to you or not?

Are you satisfied with the opportunities that you have to communicate with native speakers?

What kinds of difficulties or barriers do you have in the communication?

How do you like the school and living in here?

