

Research Proposal

Research Title

A Case Study of Overseas Chinese Students' Identity Development in Academic Context

Research Background

In the post-epidemic era, an increasing number of Chinese youths choose to study abroad in UK due to its consistent leading-role in most of the fields in academia as well as its relatively stable and safe social environment. Even though China has been played an active part in globalization, the Chinese overseas students immersed in the test-oriented educational system and the Socialist core values for years before must have encountered the inside-out cultural conflicts and challenges in a different social and academic environment. Being confident in their majors though, the majority of the Chinese overseas students, especially the newcomers, are always confronted with the obstacles of expressing themselves efficiently in English in academic situations, which may consequently have an effect on the building-up of their academic identities.

Writing is a medium of personal voicing-out and reaching-out, the process of which involves not only such variables as genre-based word choice, sentence constructing and information processing, but also that of social-cultural placement in specific context. Writing in a foreign language in the academic context of a native-speaking country, for the writer, may even more challenging in terms of the differences in format, logic patterns, writing strategies, and more importantly the writing motivations, including who are the potential readers, what are the self-achievements and what are the academic contributions. These variables intertwine with each other in the process of writing, dominantly and invisibly participating in the construction of one's academic identity.

Research Questions

The research is concerned about how the overseas Chinese students gradually construct learner identity in academic context. To be specific:

1. To what extent does academic writing play a role in constructing overseas Chinese students' identity as a learner?
2. In what ways does academic writing construct overseas Chinese students' discursive identity and activity identity in various writing situations, such as brain-storming with peers, negotiating feedback with mentors, peer-editing in workshops and paper-presenting in seminars?
3. How can learner identity influence overseas Chinese students' growth of academic productivity?

Theoretical Framework

Ivanic (1998), proposed from social cultural perspective, put forward a social identity theory which is related to academic discourse. This theoretical framework centres on four concepts of “self” consisting of a writer’s identity: (1) “autobiographical self”, which refers to any writing behaviour of the writer in the process of writing; (2) “discursive self”, which refers to the self-image the writer intends to embed in writing; (3) “self as a writer”, which refers to the beliefs or positions the writer strongly hold in writing; (4) “contextual self”, which refers to writer’s social-cultural connection to certain situations embodied in writing. **Ivanic & Camps (2001)** further elaborated the cores of realizing one’s identity in writing, i.e., conceptions (key beliefs and positions), interpersonality (interaction with the readers) and textuality (ways of constructing the text).

Gee (2000) categorized identity into another four types, i.e., (1) nature-identity, which is developed by forces or powers of a nation; (2) institution-identity, which is authorized by authorities within institutions; (3) discourse-identity, which is recognized in dialogues with individuals; (4) affinity-identity, which is shared in practices of affinity groups. By emphasising the interconnectivity of the four, Gee argued both in theory and in practice that these are the four inseparable aspects in forming and sustaining one’s identity, especially in modern and post-modern era.

Hyland’s interactional model of writer identity (2005) further provided an insightful understanding of tracing the embodiment of one’s identity in writing. Two parts compose this model: (1) stance, which refers to rhetorical expressions on certain issues in one’s writing; (2) engagement, which refers to the interactions between writers and readers.

Methodology

This research intends to use the following methods: literature research; synchronic and diachronic studies; field study; classroom observation; interviews and surveys; case study.

Research Objectives

The overall objective is but not limited to explore the development of overseas Chinese students’ learner identity at the universities of UK. To be specific:

1. **To reach out** the latest research outcomes concerning overseas Chinese identity development as learners in different educational settings at different age, such as homeschool literacy learning, K-12 literacy learning, graduate learning and postgraduate learning.
2. **To learn about** the latest research methodology on classroom discourse analysis, especially how to conduct corpus-based discourse analysis in English language teaching and learning classroom.
3. **To probe into** the latest theories and ethnographic methodology on ecological interactions between the social-cultural affordances and the learners in educational settings with a focus on such factors as sociality, reciprocity, modulability and identity in-between language learner, language and settings in writing.
4. **To seek for** the latest development on ESL/EFL teacher education pedagogy

and research, particularly with a reference to the curriculum and practices for pre-service and in-service teacher education programs, as well as to follow up research on the effect of teachers' knowledge, beliefs and perceptions on their own pedagogical practices through the reflection of their discursive practices.

Research Guarantee

1. **My preliminary research foundation.** With more than 21-year of EFL teaching experience in China, 3-year of training for M.A. in Applied Linguistics, 5-year of training for Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology and 1-year overseas learning experience as an exchange student at College of Education, University of Massachusetts—Amherst, I have developed myself to be a rather independent and interdisciplinary teacher-researcher, currently with a strong interest for overseas Chinese students' recognition, acknowledgement and uptake of the ecological affordances in social-cultural context so as to construct learner identity.
2. **Rich academic resources in the University of Bath.** The Department of Education at University of Bath holds a strong national and international reputation for research on policy, culture, pedagogy and diversity in various educational context with a great number of outstanding scholars, who could provide me insightful and far-reaching guidance on my research, such as Prof. Xiao Lan Curdt-Christiansen, Dr. Reka Ratkaine Jablonkai, Prof. Andrea Abbas, Dr. Santiago Sanchez, just to name a few.
3. **Sufficient funding from China Council Scholarship.** China Council Scholarship will support my 12-month expenses during my stay, including accommodation, transportation fee traveling fee for conferences and insurance, which with I could concentrate on and fulfill my learning and research at the University of Bath.
4. **My sound personality and healthy physique.** I am an outgoing as well as outreaching person with a strong curiosity towards the outside world and various interests and hobbies like reading, writing, cooking, baking, cycling, hiking, swimming and jogging, by which my life and work, mind and body are all well balanced.

Research Significance

1. **Theoretical contribution.** The exploration and outcomes on overseas Chinese students' identity development in academic context will further enrich the theory of writer identity construction under globally social-cultural context.
2. **Practical contribution.** My teaching experiences as well as academic endeavors as an EFL teacher and researcher may also provide multicultural insights and inspirations, especially for those with a vision to reach out by foreign language teaching, and enrich the studies of teacher education and pre-service development in a global context as well.

Research plans

1. From January to March: to continue to do literary research and field observation; to audit certain courses.
2. From April to June: to attend conferences and collect data.
3. From July to September: to do semi-structure interview and analyze the data.
4. From October to December: to write up and submit the research paper; to audit certain courses.

References

- Ivanic, R.. *Writing and Identify: The Discoursal Construction of Identity in Academic Writing*. Amsterdam: John Benjamin's Press, 1998.
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