

An Exploration of International Chinese Students' Linguistic Self-Efficacy Beliefs in English  
in a Study Abroad Context

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## Abstract

Given the increasing number of Chinese international students studying at Canadian universities, it is important to understand the actualities and needs of this special group of population in this special context. Even though these students had to demonstrate their English proficiency in tests in order to be admitted to an English-medium university, some of them still expressed difficulties and a lack of confidence in using English under certain circumstances. Some also reported that being immersed in the English-speaking environment did not seem to bring them the significant linguistic gain as expected. This study took a closer look at what was behind such negative self-perceptions from the point of Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory. The academic purpose of this study was to validate and extend Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory; the practical purpose of this thesis was to voice Chinese international students' concerns and to propose methods of support. Through an adapted Language Contact Profile, ACTFL Can-Do Statements, and semi-structured interviews, this qualitative study provided insights into seven international Chinese graduate students' varied linguistic self-efficacy beliefs in English, as well as the sources and influence of these beliefs in their academic and social lives. Hopefully, both Chinese international students and the host institution can benefit from the findings of this study to take facilitative measures on their own part.

*Keywords:* Self-efficacy, study abroad, self-perceptions, English usage, culture

## Résumé

Étant donné le nombre croissant d'étudiants étrangers chinois qui étudient dans les universités canadiennes, il est important de comprendre les réalités et les besoins de ce groupe particulier de la population dans ce contexte particulier. Même si ces étudiants ont démontré leur maîtrise de l'anglais dans les tests pour pouvoir être admis à l'université de langue anglaise, certains d'entre eux ont quand même exprimé des difficultés et un manque de confiance dans l'utilisation de l'anglais dans certaines circonstances. Certains ont également indiqué que le fait d'être immergé dans l'environnement anglophone leur n'avait pas apporté le gain linguistique important attendu. Cette étude a examiné de plus près ce qui était à l'origine de ces auto-perceptions négatives sous la lumière de la théorie de l'auto-efficacité de Bandura (1997). Le but académique de cette étude était de valider et d'étendre la théorie de l'auto-efficacité de Bandura (1997); le but pratique de cette thèse était de permettre aux des étudiants internationaux chinois d'exprimer leurs préoccupations et de proposer des méthodes de soutien. Au moyen d'un profil de contact linguistique adapté, de déclarations de Can-Do ACTFL et d'entrevues semi-structurées, cette étude qualitative a permis de mieux comprendre les diverses croyances d'auto-efficacité linguistique en anglais de sept étudiants provenant de la Chine, ainsi que les sources et l'influence de ces croyances dans leur vie scolaire et sociale. Il est à espérer que les étudiants internationaux chinois et l'établissement d'accueil pourront profiter des inspirations de l'étude pour prendre des mesures de facilitation de leur propre part.

*Mots-clés:* auto-efficacité, études à l'étranger, auto-perceptions, usage de l'anglais, culture

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

As of late, study abroad (SA) research has been gaining popularity as a result of internationalization in higher education (Li, 2014). Though the nomenclature of SA varies from one study to another and there is no universal baseline definition of SA shared in the literature, Kinginger's (2009) definition of SA seems to be the most appropriate in the context of the current study, namely, "a temporary sojourn of pre-defined duration, undertaken for educational purposes (p.11)". More specifically, the participants in the current study – international Chinese graduate students in their second academic year within the three-year time limitation of their degree, belong to the category of "full study abroad for a foreign degree or qualification" (Kinging, 2009, p.9). The existing SA research is mainly about what benefit students can gain from the overseas experience and what factors lead to the differentiated benefit to students (e.g. Bedinghaus, 2015; Pérez-Vidal, 2014; Rees & Klapper, 2007). On a macro level, the linguistic gains brought by study abroad experience are under the spotlight. People often assume that students studying abroad have considerable contact with the language of the host country, which leads to proficiency development in that language (Magnan & Back, 2007). On a micro level, existing research explores individual differences which generate the diversity of learners' linguistic gains, such as age (e.g. Baker, 2010; Davidson, 2010), gender (e.g. Davidson, 2012; Vande Berg et al., 2009), initial levels of proficiency (e.g. Davidson, 2012; Vande Berg et al., 2009), learners' motivation, attitudes, and beliefs (e.g. Juan-Garau, Salazar-Noguera & Prieto-Arranz, 2014; Hernández, 2010). The extensive body of work on individual differences usually consists of a single correlation looking into the relationship between one or several factors and participants' performances or

linguistic gains (Hessel, 2017).

Despite the significant contribution of a substantial number of quantitative studies made in identifying the presence of certain factors in predicting learning outcomes (Hessel, 2017), I think the correlational studies mentioned above oversimplify the context of language learning and overlook the influence of interweaving factors on language use. As a result, such research contributes little towards interpreting "the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem in their natural settings" (Creswell, 2013, p.44). In order to complement the statistical analysis, we need qualitative analysis to gain deep insight into disregarded factors in the complex language learning process. Therefore, the current study delves into one important component of learner beliefs—self-efficacy beliefs—from the point of view of a particular population of second language speakers in a study abroad context, utilizing qualitative research methodology. The linguistic self-efficacy in English discussed in this study is defined as follows: international Chinese students' confidence about their ability to complete certain English language-related tasks.

### **1.1 Background and Rationale**

As a result of globalization and China's booming economy, Chinese students have become the largest student group in the world to study in foreign countries (Zhu, 2016). Following a series of reforms in policy, the number of Chinese students studying abroad has increased from only 860 persons in 1978 to 523,700 persons in 2015, at a dramatic growth rate of 607.95 percent (see Table 1).

Table 1.

*Statistics on postgraduates and students studying abroad (1978-2015) (Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2016)*

Year	Number of Postgraduates			(person)	
	Graduates	Entrants	Enrolment	Number of Students Studying Abroad	Number of Returned Students
1978	9	10708	10934	860	248
1980	476	3616	21604	2124	162
1985	17004	46871	87331	4888	1424
1990	35440	29649	93018	2950	1593
1995	31877	51053	145443	20381	5750
2000	58767	128484	301239	38989	9121
2001	67809	165197	393256	83973	12243
2002	80841	202611	500980	125179	17945
2003	111091	268925	651260	117307	20152
2004	150777	326286	819896	114682	24726
2005	189728	364831	978610	118515	34987
2006	255902	397925	1104653	134000	42000
2007	311839	418612	1195047	144000	44000
2008	344825	446422	1283046	179800	69300
2009	371273	510953	1404942	229300	108300
2010	383600	538177	1538416	284700	134800
2011	429994	560168	1645845	339700	186200
2012	486455	589673	1719818	399600	272900
2013	513626	611381	1793953	413900	353500
2014	535863	621323	1847689	459800	364800
2015	551522	645055	1911406	523700	409100

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the most popular study designations for Chinese students are English-speaking countries: The United States received over 41.4% of Chinese master's or doctoral students, the largest share, followed by the United Kingdom (16%) and Australia (13.1%) in the year of 2013. (OECD, 2016, p.344-345). It is reasonable to assume that learners come to an English-speaking country with a purpose of not only accumulating subject knowledge, but also improving English proficiency.

With English as one of the two official languages and generous provision of permanent residence policy to international graduates, Canada has attracted a large amount of

international students (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2013). In addition, the Canadian government has identified China as an important market for education providers in Canada, thus Citizenship and Immigration Canada has initiated certain promotions, such as the Study Direct Stream for qualifying study permit applicants in China. Under this stream, students who have been admitted to a designated institute and have attained the required level of English proficiency could submit a Guaranteed Investment Certificate from any designated bank. This certificate works as a replacement of most required financial documents, which makes the application for a study permit much easier (Canada, 2012). Thanks to the effort Canadian government has put into facilitating international education, an increasingly large number of Chinese students have been attracted to study in Canada. Therefore, deep insights into international Chinese students' situations at an English university in Canada are of both theoretical value for researchers and of practical worth to the growing group of international Chinese students studying in Canada and other English-speaking countries.

## **1.2 Researcher Motivation**

As an international Chinese graduate student majoring in second language education at an English university in Canada for over two semesters, I was surprised to find that my cohort, including myself, perceive that our linguistic capabilities in English are not as good as expected. During some free talks after class, we spoke of various situations where we feel our English is not efficacious enough. In other words, we felt our English proficiency was not high enough to fully understand others or to make ourselves understood. Joining in-class discussion and answering phone calls were deemed as the worst scenarios. Not knowing what we should share, not being used to arguing with others, and being afraid of making mistakes

in our responses, we tended to remain silent in class. Even more than in daily face-to-face conversations, we find it harder to carry on phone conversations, where "communicative compensation strategies" such as gesturing cannot be employed (Oxford, Lavine & Crookall, 1989).

Inspired by our surprisingly unanimous negative self-perception at that time, I looked into literature about international students' study abroad experiences, especially Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) learners', and EFL/ESL learners' linguistic self-efficacy. It turns out that a complex web of cultural conflicts and mismatches between the Confucian Heritage Culture learners' context and Western educational culture leads to difficulties in Chinese students' study abroad experiences (e.g. Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Jæger & Gram, 2015; Nguyen, Telouw & Pilot, 2006; Parris-Kidd & Barnett, 2011). People have recognized that the cultural and linguistic barriers cause problems for international students (Devlin & Peacock, 2009). Moreover, there is an evident dearth of representation of Chinese students' language learning process within the literature on language learning in SA, as supported by Kinginger's critical review of a large number of studies (2009).

That being said, the problem of international students being unable to function effectively in English lies not only with their linguistic skills, but also with the confidence that they can use such skills well, in accordance with the theory of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). By influencing the choice of activities and motivational level, self-efficacy beliefs exert great influence over personal agency, thus over skill acquisition (Bandura, 2006).

Therefore, I am going to investigate international Chinese students' self-efficacy beliefs in the realm of using English to accomplish different tasks in everyday life.

To be specific, my two focuses in this thesis are the sources and the effects of the participants' self-efficacy beliefs. In order to endow the abstract concept of linguistic efficacy beliefs with concrete representation, I looked into the four essential subskills in second language learning, namely reading, speaking, listening, and writing. Following the categories defined by National Standards for 21st Century Language Learning (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), 2015), I attempted to explore participants' self-efficacy beliefs in their interpersonal communication, presentational speaking, presentational writing, interpretive listening, interpretive reading.

In addition, the current study is distinct from previous studies in recruiting a special group of learners as participants - international Chinese students who are studying in an English speaking country with "spontaneous/untutored language learning in the natural speech community" (Freed, 1995, p.5). By contrast, attention to efficacy beliefs has previously been mostly centered around teachers (e.g. Major & Dolly, 2003; Velu & Sahari Bin Nordin, 2011) or relating learners' attainments to efficacy beliefs (e.g. Hsieh & Schallert, 2008; Abedini & Rahimi, 2009; Nariman-Jahan & Rahimpour, 2010). Learning about self-efficacy beliefs is of great interest to individuals for self-reflection and self-adjustment in their academic and practical life, as well as for schools to set up corresponding programs to accommodate an increasing number of international Chinese students.

In summary, the purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the linguistic self-efficacy beliefs of international Chinese graduate students at a Canadian English-language university. At this stage in the research, the linguistic self-efficacy beliefs will be generally defined as participants' beliefs in their linguistic capabilities in various situations.

### **1.3 Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis is organized into six chapters, including the present one (Introduction). Following a brief overview of the background and rationale for the research, as well as the researcher's motivation, the second chapter (Literature Review) analyzes previous research regarding language learning under a study abroad context, unpacks the concept of self-efficacy together with its relationship to second language learning, presents Confucian Heritage Learners' unique characteristics in learning, and reviews methodological conventions of assessing self-efficacy. In the third chapter (Methodology), I describe and justify the participant recruitment process, the employment of instruments - questionnaires and interviews, data collection and analysis methods. The ensuing fourth chapter (Results) present the data collected in response to the research questions. Further interpretation of key research findings and the implications make up the fifth chapter (Discussion). In the final chapter (Conclusion), the thesis ends with a discussion of the contributions and limitations of the study, as well as by recommendations for future research and orientation programs for international Chinese students.



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Study Abroad and Language Learning**

In examining why Chinese students choose to study abroad, searching for a high-quality higher education and desiring improvement in foreign language skills are found to be two of the key reasons (Counsell, 2011; Wu, 2014). With a presumption that Study Abroad (SA) is the optimal environment for learning the native language of the destination country, which is the second language of the students, an increasing number of students choose to study abroad to fulfill their goals in foreign language learning, which has generated the abundant SA research. Some research indeed suggested that SA is a productive environment for the development of communicative competence in foreign languages (e.g. Hernández, 2010; Kinginger, 2008). It seems reasonable to assume that international students will finally become very proficient in the use of their target language, as a result of the combination of immersion in the native speech community and integration with formal classroom learning (Freed, 1995). The corresponding SA research mainly focuses on testing the effect of study abroad programs on certain constructs, such as learners' linguistic competence, learning strategies, motivation (e.g. Allen, 2010; Dewey, 2004; Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2008). Among these studies, subjective responses and holistic testing instruments are the two widely employed methods for demonstrating students' linguistic outcomes (Kinger, 2009; Pérez-Vidal, 2015). Next, I will briefly review the studies with such research methods to provide a better understanding of whether participating students did become more proficient in their second language upon their return.

### **2.1.1 Study abroad and oral fluency and proficiency.**

In the exploration of the potential benefits of learners' SA experiences, one of the most commonly investigated topics is oral fluency and proficiency. Due to the subjectivity in judging fluency and the complexity in defining fluency, scholars tend to break down the general concept of fluency and to investigate constructs of fluency respectively (e.g. speech rate, total words spoken) (Freed, Segalowitz & Dewey, 2004). In examining these constructs of oral fluency and proficiency, the dominant comparison studies in SA contexts have produced mixed results.

Some research suggests learners studying overseas have achieved more progress in oral linguistic skills than the study at home (AH) group (Juan-Garau et al, 2014; Kinginger, 2008; Langford, 1995). Resorting to the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) and Educational Testing Service (ETS), Lafford (1995) compared the performances of two groups of university-level Anglo second language students of Spanish, of which one group studied abroad and the other control group studied at home in a traditional classroom learning setting. The SA group outperformed the control group after a semester, especially in communication strategies.

In the same vein, Freed, Segalowitz, and Dewey (2004) recorded interviews with 28 Anglo second language learners of French, which were similar to the OPI Proficiency Interview. However, the researchers came to a conclusion distinct from Lafford's (1995). The pretest and posttest interviews provided the variation among the linguistic outcomes of three different language learning contexts, namely, the formal classroom at home

context, the intensive domestic immersion context, and the study abroad context.

Measuring participants' fluency from six variables (i.e. rate, hesitation-free, filler-free, fluent-run, repeat-free, and repair-free), the researchers found the students in the domestic immersion program made the most significant linguistic gains overall.

Therefore, the researchers found evidence that did not support the prevailing belief that study abroad brings about more progress in fluency than the AH settings.

As we can see, apparent contradictions between domestic language learning and SA oral fluency and proficiency abound in the SA literature. Some research findings are in favor of the SA group (e.g. Allen & Herron, 2003; Isabelli-Garcia, 2003; Llanes, Mora and Serrano, 2017), while others have found no significant difference between SA and AH learners (e.g. Collentine & Freed, 2004; DeKeyser, 2014). A subsequent section of this chapter will touch on the reasons why such complexities and discrepancies exist later in this chapter.

### **2.1.2 Study abroad and listening comprehension.**

When reviewing the literature about listening comprehension in the SA context, I found the evident dearth in listening studies as mentioned in several scholars' works (e.g. Beatie, Valls-Ferrer and Pérez-Vidal, 2014; Collentine, 2009; Dekeyser, 2007; Kinginger, 2009). Partially due to such scarcity, the current body of research lacks diversity and comprehensiveness, and existing studies provide virtually unanimous corroborative evidence that participants have made noticeable progress in listening after studying abroad. I will briefly review several recent representative studies to demonstrate the inconsistency of the results.

Most SA studies documenting participants' gains in listening performance employed a quantitative research instrument. For example, Allen & Herron (2003) discovered a significant increase in twenty-five American university students' French listening skills after taking a summer SA program in Paris. Besides analyzing students' pre-SA and post-SA scores in the French Listening Proficiency test with a paired samples t-test, the researchers also used a questionnaire to investigate participants' self-reports of French listening abilities. Overall, the majority of participants demonstrated a better understanding of native speakers and enhanced confidence in performing specific listening tasks, such as "understand movies without subtitles". Similarly, Beattie, Valls-Ferrer and Pérez-Vidal (2014) examined the short-term and long-term effects of a SA period on the listening abilities of seventy-five Spanish/Catalan EFL learners over two years and a half. The results show that participants in SA made more significant gains in listening scores than those in the Formal Instruction (FI) context at home. Moreover, the benefits of SA remained 15 months later.

In a similar vein, Bedinghaus (2015) focused on the effect of exposure to phonological variation. He discovered that the American English-speaking L2 learners of Spanish in an SA group made more gains in the knowledge of /s/-aspiration in terms of accuracy of identification and lexical decision response time in comparison with learners in the traditional language classroom context at home. The results of multiple instruments corroborated that immersion during SA brings about "perceptual gains" pertinent to a particular dialectic phonological variant (Bedinghaus, 2015, pp. vi).

Nevertheless, not all scholars concur that SA experience makes significant

contributions to participants' listening comprehension skills. For example, Cubillos, Chieffo, and Fan (2008) measured the progress of two groups of intermediate-level Spanish learners. The two groups of undergraduate students were enrolled in the same five-week intensive course, which the two groups took at home and abroad respectively. After analyzing participants' performance in the listening portion of the Spanish Advanced Placement Test before treatment and post treatment, Cubillos and his colleagues concluded that students made equal progress in the development of L2 listening skills regardless of whether they completed the course on campus or abroad.

Doubtless, the above mentioned research designs differ from each other to some extent. Nevertheless, the comparison research scheme these studies shared ensured the comparability of these studies. It is obvious that SA learners progress variously in their listening abilities. Whether SA is the optimal, if imperfect, context for language learners to hone their listening comprehension skills is thus still open to discussion.

### **2.1.3 Study abroad and reading.**

As Kinginger (2009) noted, competence in reading and writing in the SA literature is "remarkably under-represented" (p.61). Here we will review the rare studies unequivocally focused on the reading of students studied abroad. Researchers in Second Language Acquisition field have widely supported that reading is both a product and a process (e.g. Dewey, 2002; Liu, 2014; Urquhart & Weir, 1998). In investigating reading development in the SA context, researchers follow the corresponding pattern - examining participants' reading processes and concomitant reading comprehension.

Dewey (2002) investigated the role of context in reading development by

comparing the reading comprehension and processes of English-speaking learners of Japanese in an intensive domestic immersion program (IM) (in the United States) and in SA (in Japan) settings. With measures of free-recall protocols, vocabulary knowledge tests, and self-assessments, ANCOVA results showed significant difference between the IM and SA only on self-assessment. Overall, IM learners made comparable gains in reading as SA learners did.

Similarly, Liu (2014) looked into L2 learners' reading comprehension as well as the reading strategies adopted during the comprehension process. Combining comprehension tests, interviews, observation, think-aloud protocols, a strategy questionnaire, and the Language Contact Profile, Liu conducted the study with 73 learners of Chinese from the US. One group of these participants attended an eight-week intensive language and culture program in China, while the other group took the equivalent regular course in the US. After analyzing the data qualitatively and quantitatively, Liu concluded that the general language proficiency of the SA groups was significantly higher than the AH groups among learners at intermediate and high levels. Besides reading proficiency, the SA experience was also found to benefit the use of reading strategies.

Taking a step further, Kinginger (2008) documented the significant gains in both Reading and Listening proficiencies of a group of twenty-four American students in France with the standard measurement - *Test de Français International*, together with the reasons underlying learners' varied linguistic performances. As Kinginger suggested, SLA researchers aiming to explore the nature of SA experiences need to "dig deeper"

and to take students' personal variability into consideration. It was appeals such as this that inspired my study.

#### **2.1.4 Study abroad and writing development.**

In spite of the fact that writing is a rather everyday practice and a central component of students' academic life at the university level, writing has received relatively scant attention in contrast with oral proficiency findings, which accords with social expectations (Pérez-Vidal & Juan-Garau, 2009). The existing research into L2 writing under different contexts is mostly product- or process-oriented. Quantitative measurements for sub-domains of writing abilities, such as fluency, accuracy, are often employed in order to reflect the changes in learners' writing skills. Qualitative evaluations and interviews complement statistics with insights into textual and learner features. Following are some representative studies in Second Language (L2) writing with a focus on the SA context.

Freed, So, and Lazar (2003) recruited French native speakers as judges to assess English-speaking learners' written and oral fluency of French. Taking "grammar," "vocabulary", "expression of thought", and "organization" into account, the judges holistically discerned that the AH students' writing fluency declined slightly, while the SA group registered an increase, though not statistically significant, in the level of written fluency (p.37). In addition, the analysis of underlying linguistic and textual features indicated that the SA students tended to write longer essays and use denser lexicon in the posttest than in the pretest. No such difference was found on the AH learners.

Inspired by the study of Freed, So, and Lazar (2003), Pérez-Vidal and Juan-Garau (2009) evaluated participants' writing production at four spaced intervals with a composition and self-report questionnaires. Those Spanish and Catalan bilingual learners, who spent a trimester in an English-speaking country, were found to have made significant gains in their written fluency, accuracy, lexical and grammatical complexity. In contrast, the FI and AH groups did not display any progress in any of the written proficiency measures used, except modest gains in accuracy. The results also suggested that individual features are potential determinants of learners' success.

In a similar way, monitoring writing progress, Sasaki (2004, 2007) analyzed changes in the English writing performances of SA and AH Japanese university students. Through interpreting various data from written texts, observation, stimulated recall protocols, and interviews, Sasaki found that those in the SA group were more motivated and confident to write better L2 compositions. Even if both groups progressed in general English proficiency, only participants who spent four to nine months in English-speaking countries improved their L2 writing ability and fluency, together with the use of writing strategies. Nevertheless, the research also indicated that a period of three and a half years was not long enough for these EFL learners to become an expert in English writing. The above studies all point to the direction for further investigating the factors behind such diverse linguistic gains.

### **2.1.5 Study abroad and individual differences.**

Overall, we can see most research has revolved around the comparison and contrast of outcomes of language acquisition under the SA and AH contexts. At the same time,



these research also unveiled the uniqueness of learners implicitly, considering the varied linguistic gains learners obtained. Why do students with similar educational background who have been admitted to the same program perform so differently? Why does the same student exhibit quite distinct linguistic abilities under different situations? Such inter-subject and intra-subject variations have spurred a number of studies (e.g. Pérez-Vidal & Juan-Garau, 2011; Yan & Berlinger, 2011). Scholars have made many attempts to pinpoint the key external predictors of learners' success at a macro level (e.g. Allen, 2010; Davidson, 2010), and to identify internal individual differences contributing to learners' divergent linguistic progress at a micro level (e.g. Hessel, 2017; Rees & Klapper, 2007).

A range of contextual features influencing learners' linguistic development have been explored. To name a few, SA program duration (e.g. Avello & Lara, 2014; Rees & Klapper, 2007; Trenchs-Parera, 2009), accommodation types (Allen, 2010; Llanes, Mora & Serrano, 2017), the language of instruction (e.g. Vande Berg, Connor-Linton & Paige, 2009). Nevertheless, research emphasizing outcomes has a tendency to overlook learners' own unique disposition toward language learning (Kington, 2009). To complement the external factors, scholars also looked into a range of internal factors, namely, individual differences. The most common study purpose of investigating individual differences is to find correlations among different individual differences, thus granting insights into the nature of variation (DeKeyser, 2012). As a result, there has been a substantial amount of correlational studies on language learning outcome and variables, such as gender (e.g., Davidson, 2010; Diao, 2014; Hurst, 2018; Trentman, 2013; Vande Berg et al., 2009), age

(e.g., Baker, 2010; Baker-Smemoe, Dewey, Bown, & Martinsen, 2014; Dewey, Bown, Baker, Martinsen, Gold, & Eggett, 2014; Llanes & Muñoz, 2013), personality (e.g., Baker-Smemoe et al., 2014; Dewey et al., 2014; Zafar & Meenakshi, 2012), prior academic achievement (e.g., Davidson, 2010; Magnan & Back, 2007), pre-program proficiency (e.g., Davidson, 2010; Vande Berg et al., 2009), and motivation and L2 use anxiety (e.g., Allen, 2010; Juan-Garau et al., 2014).

Another significant yet underexplored component of individual differences affecting the stay of sojourners, whose focus is temporary study away from home rather than long-term migration, is self-efficacy (Kinger, 2009). The interrelationship between learners' self-efficacy and their achievement in L2 learning have been corroborated to be positive (Hessel, 2017; Hsieh & Kang, 2010; Moreno & Kilpatrick, 2018). From a vantage point building on previous studies, the current study further investigates how self-efficacy beliefs influence learners' language acquisition and use, as well as how social, cultural and educational experiences account for learners' linguistic self-efficacy beliefs (LSE).

## **2.2 Self-Efficacy**

### **2.2.1 Self-efficacy: the construct and its influence.**

Bandura (1994) defined perceived self-efficacy as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives", which "determines how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave (p.72)". Simply put, perceived self-efficacy is a judgment of one's ability to organize or execute certain performances (Bandura, 1997).

The construct emerged from Bandura's (1977) fundamental experiment in

analyzing adult snake-phobics' self-efficacy and behavioral changes attained in fearful and avoidant treatment. Participants received treatments fashioned to initiate different levels of efficacy expectations. Specifically, some engaged in participant modeling, which is they undertook progressively more threatening activities with a boa with whatever assistance was needed; some received modeling treatment, which is simply observing the therapist performing the interactive activities with snakes for some time; the control group received no treatment. Participants' levels of efficacy expectations and performances were measured pre- and post-test. As predicted, performance changes correspond to the increments in self-efficacy. Both treatment groups reported increased efficacy expectations and demonstrated being more capable of coping with snakes in actual performance in comparison with the control group. Therefore, Bandura concluded self-efficacy beliefs as a predictor of human behaviors.

Generally speaking, self-efficacy has been classified into two types: task self-efficacy and self-regulatory self-efficacy. The respective focuses of the two types of efficacy are the estimates of future behavior and the determinants of choice of behaviors (Woodgate, Brawley & Weston, 2005). As a result of the two types of efficacy beliefs being tightly interwoven in real life, researchers seldom view one type of self-efficacy apart from the other during investigation. The self-efficacy construct has since then been explored in a range of disciplines to explain human behaviors (Samuel, 2016). Overall efficacy beliefs impact upon people's effort expenditure and persistence, personal life choices, thought patterns and emotional reactions, level of motivation, quality of functioning, resilience to adversity and vulnerability to stress (Bandura, 1986, 1994). In

other words, efficacy beliefs influence performance both directly and by altering intentions (Bandura, 1997). People's levels of involvement in activities then regulate the social, physical and intellectual functioning throughout their lifespan.

To give an example in the field of education, learners with a strong sense of self-efficacy consider difficult tasks as challenges that can be mastered, rather than threats that should be avoided. In addition to engaging in tasks and situations learners believe exceed their capabilities, those with stronger efficacy beliefs devote more vigorous and persistent effort into accomplishing the task. Even if all those efforts did not yield in success in the end, they are more likely to allocate attention to seeking solutions for the failure. In contrast, less efficacious learners may attribute their failures to deficient ability, bad luck, etc. In this regard, self-efficacy plays a key role by helping or hindering learner's progress (Bandura, 1984, 1986, 1997).

### **2.2.2 Self-efficacy: the sources.**

Efficacy beliefs are not contrived from thin air. They are structured partly based on judgment of one's knowledge and skills, but they affect human behaviors independently of actual skills or past performance (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1986, 1997) proposed the social-cognitive theory and hypothesized that learners form their efficacy beliefs from four sources, namely, mastery experiences / enactive attainment, vicarious experience for judging capabilities in comparison and contrast with others, verbal or social persuasion of significant others, and emotional together with physiological states from which people judge their capability.

Among these four sources, mastery experiences is suggested to be the most potent

one (Bandura, 1997; Biran & Wilson, 1981), as they provide the most authentic evidence of whether one can muster whatever it takes to succeed. Successes boost self-efficacy appraisals, while failures, especially those that do not seem to be resulting from lack of effort, lower them. In other words, mastery experiences directly influence the development of emotional, cognitive, and emotional processes, which leads to the evolution of self-efficacy beliefs (Usher, 2009).

In addition to one's personal previous experiences, vicarious experience also guides people's judgment of their abilities. Observing other similar people completed a task successfully can increase one's self-efficacy, and vice versa. Such modeling influence is particularly prominent when one lacks prior experience or direct knowledge of the undertakings they are dealing with. Likewise, comparisons to negative models who succeed, or comparisons to positive models who fail, could abate people's self-efficacy for the exemplary task (Bandura, 1994). Vicarious experience is susceptible to change, as it largely depends on social comparison with model behaviors (Bandura, 1977).

Another regulating factor with even more ease and ready availability in daily life is verbal or social persuasion (Bandura, 1997). People are talked into believing that they possess or lack certain capabilities to achieve their goals. Such persuasive means are more likely to hinder self-efficacy beliefs than to produce enduring increases in perceived efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1986). While the "bubble" of illusory boosts will burst at the face of the results of disconfirming actions, negative social persuasion tends to make people shun tasks which are said to be beyond their capabilities. Disparaging comments can easily discourage people from trying. Nevertheless, well-thought-out feedback that attend to

students' skill development has been proved to be particularly helpful in building learners' self-efficacy (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Varied situations normally elicit various emotional and physiological states which feeds the self-efficacy beliefs with information. Depending on the circumstances, people can be relaxed, nervous, anxious, offended, stressed, etc.. The emotional arousal touches people's physiological state, which in turn shapes the way people perceive the environment. It is the perception and interpretation of these physiological and emotional states that inform a person's efficacy. For example, nervous speakers are very likely to sweat. They probably will interpret their sweating as distress resulting from personal failings. As a matter of fact, perhaps everyone in that room sweats due to the physical discomfort caused by a malfunctioning air conditioner. As Bandura (1986) suggested, people differ in their "judgmental sets" (p. 407). Those who tend to attribute their emotional arousal or physiological changes to personal inadequacies are more inclined to lower their self-efficacy than those who view their arousal as a normal transient human reaction.

Besides the above four most widely acknowledged sources, researchers have looked into the contribution of other diverse influential factors, including gender (e.g. Pajares, Johnson & Usher, 2007), ethnicity (e.g. Usher & Pajares, 2006), and classroom contextual features (e.g. Joët, Usher & Bressoux, 2011). However, a limitation of the existing research conducted on the construct of self-efficacy itself or the sources of self-efficacy is the manner in which the sources have been measured. Below I discuss the measures used for assessment.

### **2.2.3 Self-efficacy: the assessment.**

This section introduces the standards and rationale of instrument construction for

assessing self-efficacy, including detailing self-efficacy to be assessed, possessing enough background knowledge of the activity domain, and employing tasks of graded levels of difficulties. As the definition of self-efficacy indicates, self-efficacy beliefs are always paired with certain behavior or tasks, thus the assessment of self-efficacy should be "behaviorally specific rather than general" (Betz, 2013, p. 379). For instance, self-efficacy can be addressed apropos of fixing a computer hardware issue, solving questions about floating force in physics, or communicating effectively in a second language. Nevertheless, instruments measuring self-efficacy were often constructed too broadly to be specific to tasks (Bandura, 1997, 2006). Researchers suggested seeking an appropriate balance between generality and specificity for self-efficacy measures by thoroughly analyzing the targeted task performance (Bandura, 2006; Bong, 2006). That is also why I selected a questionnaire of which validity for measuring linguistic gains has been well evaluated (e.g. Brown, Dewey & Cox, 2014) as my instrument. Made up of concrete daily tasks, Can-Do Statements well serves the purpose of eliciting participants' self-assessment of their linguistic self-efficacy. More details can be found in the following Methodology chapter and Appendix D and E.

While laying out the aspect of personal efficacy to be measured, researchers need a good knowledge of the activity domain. Different factors can bear a close to no relation to self-efficacy beliefs, and self-efficacy beliefs can have little to enormous effect on the activity domain under investigation. Therefore, researchers need to think about the target behavior comprehensively. To cite an example Bandura (2006) presented, weight management depends on controlling calorie intake from food, calorie consumption by exercising, and genetic metabolic processes. In this case, perceived self-efficacy will better

justify variation in weight when researchers assess participants' self-efficacy beliefs in all above mentioned areas, instead of only measuring how efficacious the participants are about sticking to a healthy diet. It is also true of second/foreign language use and performance. One's linguistic performance should be evaluated from multiple areas, such as linguistic appropriacy and linguistic skills. Learners' performances are not merely decided by the level of mastery of the language, but also many other factors including their self-efficacy beliefs in the given task, their cultural background, their personal characters, etc.. Therefore, the questionnaire employed in the current study covers linguistic skills, and the following interview examines learners' self-efficacy beliefs and other sociolinguistic factors. With an aim to provide a more complete picture, I am going to introduce the uniqueness of Confucian Heritage Culture learners in the following Section 2.2.4.

Perceived self-efficacy should be measured against tasks of graded levels of difficulty. Challenges can be graded in quite a few dimensions, such as levels of accuracy, exertion, and work rate (Bandura, 2006). In second language learning and use, challenges can be graded in the richness and diversity of a speaker's speech, the levels of understanding that a learner holds toward various materials, the length and accuracy of one's writing samples, etc.. Then the degree of efficacy is evaluated from responses ranging from "yes" (I can complete the task.) to "no" (I cannot complete the task.) regarding the graded challenges. The continuum of responses to the question is usually broken down with a 0-100 point scale or a six-point Likert-type scale, if it is a quantitative study that is going to be conducted (e.g. Matthews, 2010; Pajares, Hartley & Valiente, 2001; Yang, 2017). On the other hand, if it is a qualitative research design, data collection methods normally include



observations, interviews, and open-ended questionnaires (e.g. Graham, 2006; Moreno & Kilpatrick, 2018; Wang & Page, 2007; Wong, 2005). The current study also approached the graded challenges in a qualitative way which I believe is more suitable than statistical analysis in order to capture the subtleness of participants' beliefs. More details can be found in the Methodology section.

In addition to paying attention to the validity of items and scales while constructing a behavioral test, we also need to heed researchers' advice on the temporal proximity between self-efficacy and performance assessments (Bong, 2006). In consideration of the dynamic of self-efficacy, researchers must think carefully whether self-efficacy beliefs are relatively stable by the time of measuring. Self-efficacy is suggested to be more malleable during its formation than later when the stronger effects of mastery experience contribute to its stability (Bandura, 1977). Meanwhile, if instrumentation is time sensitive, but the assessment interval is too long, participants' responses tend to be of less accuracy (as cited in Favre, 2017). Accordingly, researchers need to evaluate the situation to decide on the best timing for assessment. In the case of my study, I deliberately assessed participants' self-efficacy beliefs after they had been studying abroad for over a year. I did not ask international students to provide any baseline data upon their arrival in the foreign country, because a completely new environment could be overwhelming and anxiety-provoking for some students, thus biasing their self-perceptions during the adjustment period. As MacIntyre, Noels, and Clement (1997) found out, anxious students are inclined to underestimate their ability. Regardless of timing, the influence of self-efficacy beliefs remains in effect throughout the SL and FL learning processes after all. The following

section will review the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and Second and Foreign Language Learning.

#### **2.2.4 Self-efficacy and second / foreign language learning.**

A number of studies have established the positive relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievement (e.g. Hwang, Choi, Lee, Culver, and Hutchison, 2016; Li, 2012; Liem, Lau, & Nie, 2008; Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2008), which holds true to SL and FL learning as well. Learners' self-efficacy has been demonstrated as a positive predictor of their achievement in a wide variety of tasks, such as vocabulary (Bouffard-Bouchard, 1990), reading (e.g. Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007; Schöber, Schütte, Köller, McElvany, & Gebauer, 2018), writing (e.g. Gilson, Chow & Feltz, 2012; Halper & Vancouver, 2016; Meier, McCarthy, & Schmeck, 1984), listening (Abedini & Rahimi, 2009), attribution (Graham, 2006; Hsieh & Kang, 2010), and learning strategies (Liem et al., 2008; Wang, Spencer, & Xing, 2009; Wong, 2005). Following exemplar studies will provide more details about how self-efficacy beliefs is involved in various areas of SL and FL learning.

Bouffard-Bouchard (1990) investigated the effect of self-efficacy judgments on the 64 participating Canadian college students' cognitive performance when they had equal knowledge and experience in the performance field. Participants are asked to complete the verbal concept-formation task which focuses on French vocabulary. Combining the unfamiliar task and either positive or negative feedback, researchers experimentally created two groups of students with high and low level of self-efficacy respectively. The results revealed that students receiving positive feedback judge themselves to be more

efficacious than those receiving negative feedback. In addition, students with a higher level of efficacy set higher goals for themselves, used more efficient problem-solving strategies, and achieved higher intellectual performances than students of equal cognitive capability than students of equal cognitive ability. Further analysis showed that perceived self-efficacy beliefs bear a direct relation with task persistence and the ability to evaluate the accuracy of responses. Therefore, the study corroborates Bandura's argument that high levels of perceived self-efficacy were accompanied by higher performance attainments, and self-efficacy beliefs substantially contribute to people's motivation and action.

Likewise, efficacy expectations are found to be influential in students' writing outcomes and motivation constructs, including writing apprehension, perceived value of writing (Meier et al., 1984; Pajares, 2003; Pajares & Valiante, 1999; Pajares, Miller & Johnson, 1999). Meier and his colleagues' (1984) exploratory field study conducted among college freshmen demonstrated that efficacy expectations can predict participants' writing performance at the beginning of an introductory writing course. In addition to affecting writing outcomes, self-efficacy has been found to be related to students' motivation constructs (Pajares, 2003). Self-efficacy beliefs play a mediating role in nullifying the influence of writing apprehension, which was defined as a form of writing anxiety with possible detrimental effects leading to students' negative attitudes toward writing and poor performance (Daly & Miller, 1975). Bandura (1986) suggested that self-efficacy judgments considerably determine the value that people place on activities and tasks. Students' perceived value of writing, according to expectancy

theory, work in concert with valued outcomes in determining the tasks individuals will engage and the achievement they will have (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992).

In line with previous findings, Zimmerman and Schunk (2001) echoed that self-efficacy beliefs bear relevance to understanding students' motivation and learning. Motivation in turn "directly influences how often students use [FL] learning strategies", "how well they do on curriculum-related achievement tests" (Oxford & Shearin, 1994). Language learning strategies have been found to be positively related to language self-efficacy among seventy-four ESL pre-service teachers in Malaysia, who were enrolled in a one-year Diploma Education course (Wong, 2005). In line with previous findings, students' self-efficacy significantly contributes to the use of deep learning strategies which partially accounted for the variance in the English achievement of 1475 nationally representative Year-Nine learners in Singapore (Liem et al., 2008). In an attempt to expand the scope of domain-specific assessments, Schöber and his colleagues (2018) conducted a cross-domain study, looking into the reciprocal effects between self-efficacy and achievement in mathematics and reading. Reading fluency and mathematical achievement have been suggested to be in a reciprocal relationship with self-efficacy, namely, they positively influence each other. Besides the typical in-school settings, after-school individualized tutoring sessions also mediate learners' self-efficacy, motivation, learning strategies, and learning outcomes (Matthews, 2010). Factors influencing university tutees' self-efficacy judgments include explicit attributions to task difficulty and ability, session organization, session activity, and FL learnability

The results of aforementioned studies are rather consistent in showing that efficacy

beliefs contribute significantly to motivation and performance, even if different research designs and domain-related scales were adopted and the results are not peculiar to a particular methodology or instrument. As mentioned in Shi's (2016) meta-analysis, an increasing amount of research has been done on exploring the role of self-efficacy in ESL/EFL contexts in the past ten years, most of which explores the interrelationship between self-efficacy and certain variable(s) in language learning. These studies inform the present study in that they provide the theoretical and empirical support and shed light on the direction of the present study. However, other than the plethora of correlative studies, few studies touch on learners' overall self-efficacy. Instead, they center on the efficacy beliefs about a certain subskill limited within the classroom settings. The current research aims to fill the gap by probing into international Chinese students' self-efficacy beliefs in listening, reading, speaking, writing, together with their overall linguistic capabilities in English in everyday life.

#### **2.2.5 Self-efficacy and Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) learners.**

As mentioned earlier, the cultural and educational background has a large effect on one's decision making and performance, which also applies to Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) learners. It is generally believed that CHC environments hold a highly didactic conception of pedagogy, with teachers expected to transmit knowledge, and learners taking a silent, passive role (De Vita & Bernard, 2011). CHC learners have been categorized as a focal group with distinctive characters for quite a few studies. Many education practitioners reported concerns with CHC students' lack of autonomy, criticality, reflectivity and originality of thought (Greenholz, 2003). Asian students are largely perceived as surface

learners who rely upon rote learning and merely absorbing knowledge rather than understanding it (Purdie, Hattie & Douglas., 1996; Subramaniam, 2008). These characteristics have been commonly attributed to the influence of Confucian values, for example, children are taught to respect people who are older and who have higher rank (Ramburuth & McCormick, 2001) on the educational systems of many Pacific Rim Asian countries including China.

The few empirical studies about CHC learners' motivational constructs, including self-efficacy beliefs, looked into the effects of the particular CHC environments on learners. Partially drawing from Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1986), Ma and her colleagues (Ma, Du, & Liu, 2018) examined the mediation effect of self-efficacy beliefs on that Chinese students' English language proficiency and motivational value in an EFL context, and they found that participants' intrinsic motivational value was positively related to their self-efficacy, which in turn improved students' academic performance. Therefore, these researchers suggested EFL teachers should emphasize more intrinsic value and self-efficacy in teaching English. Nevertheless, the suggestion is not easy to adopt in authoritarian Chinese classrooms, where teachers are regarded as leaders (Salili, Chiu & Lai, 2001). Moreover, CHC learning environments usually rely much on normative evaluation, thus the CHC classrooms being highly competitive and concentrated on comparisons in evaluating students' performance (Biggs, 1996; Shih & Alexander, 2000). The comparisons then serve as the ground for students to evaluate their day-to-day schoolwork (Levine, 1983) and to ultimately assess their self-efficacy. With experimental controls in a field setting with CHC, Chan and Lam (2008) explored the effects of competition on 71 Grade-Seven Chinese students' self-

efficacy in vicarious learning. The results showed that exposure to successful models abated participants' writing self-efficacy in a competitive classroom. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that CHC learners' self-efficacy will be protected, if not boosted, when they are placed out of the competitive learning environment at home and to be put in a Western cooperative learning environment.

Nevertheless, studying abroad does not present any easiness for CHC learners. In exploring the cross-cultural adaptation of Taiwanese graduate students in the United States, Swagler and Ellis (2003) discovered themes of language barriers, confidence about speaking English, social contact with Taiwanese and Americans, and cultural differences in interviewing the participants. Their following quantitative study with 67 students confirmed it is communication apprehension and social contact, instead of actual English ability, that predicted sojourners' cultural adaptation. Similarly, Lin and Betz (2009) found Chinese and Taiwanese international students demonstrated significantly lower self-efficacy than either African American or White students do in English-speaking settings. In addition, it turned out that "comfort with the English language" is more correlated with English social self-efficacy than the item addressing fluency itself (Lin & Betz, 2009, p.468). East Asian female students have also been found to be anxious about their future due to lack of communicative competence (Bang & Montgomery, 2013). Their struggle with acculturation when they were studying in the US can possibly be explained by Pajare's (2002) self-efficacy study as well. Above-mentioned scholars also proposed that future replication study and further qualitative studies are needed to uncover the meaning of second language use in order to implement appropriate interventions for international students.

Even though CHC learners are facing unique and serious challenges in acculturation and motivation, in which self-efficacy plays a significant role, self-efficacy has been too scarcely investigated in either race homogeneous or race heterogeneous studies (Graham, 1994). Just as Pajares (2002) reviewed:

"As the world shrinks, attempting to understand to what degree the effects of self-efficacy are universal across cultures seems more critical than ever. Although there is already some evidence to suggest that self-efficacy beliefs have some similar effects across cultures, the link between culture and belief has yet to be made empirically."

In sum, it is of much academic worth to explore self-efficacy of CHC learners as a homogeneous group with a unique cultural ground. At the same time, our understanding of how schools function as social systems to influence international students' self-efficacy beliefs can be deepened, responding to Bandura's (1994) appeal to connect research to practice.

### **2.3 Methodological Conventions**

In the field of ESL/EFL, the majority of self-efficacy studies explore their interrelationship with other variables in language learning (Shi, 2017). As Anderson and Betz (2001) critiqued, little research has focused on the resources of efficacy information, in contrast to the amount of research on correlates or outcomes of self-efficacy. We can easily see from the previous review of self-efficacy beliefs in education settings that most of the studies are quantitative in nature. It is the case for the large body of literature about outcomes and influences of self-efficacy, as well as for the less extensive research that has explored the hypothesized sources of self-efficacy (Usher & Pajares, 2008). Shi (2017) reviewed the literature on learners' self-efficacy during 2005-2014 published in prestigious journals, with "self-efficacy", "second language", "foreign language" as keywords. She noticed the



dominance of quantitative research and called for more qualitative research for a deeper and more thorough understanding of self-efficacy in language learning.

With primary purposes of documenting detailed everyday events and identifying the meanings that those events have for participants and witnesses, qualitative research gives the priority to interpretation (Erickson, 2012). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research will not deliberately eliminate situational information, letting the contextual effects "balance each other out" (Stake, 2010, p. 181). As noted, qualitative research tends to be an effort to generate descriptions and situational interpretations of phenomena that the researcher can offer colleagues, students and others for modifying their own understandings of phenomena (Stake & Trumbull, 1982). Instead of reaching general social science understandings, the goal of interpretation is usually to understand a particular situation. By understanding better the complexity of the situation, we could better contribute to setting policy and professional practice (Stake, 2010). Qualitative researchers such as Yvonna Lincoln and Robert E. Stake rely heavily on "direct interpretation of events" and less on "interpreted measures". Findings are more of "assertions" which are the best-developed meanings we give to the most important things, including "how they work" (Stake, 2010, p.54). Description of how things work relies heavily on personal experience, hence the experiential research. Experiential research is not a commitment only to the values of the individual person but a commitment that the values of the individual person will be considered (Stake, 2010).

Admittedly, quantitative research contributes much to identifying certain variables and measuring variance in self-efficacy, qualitative approach is more suitable for my current research purposes. Assessing self-efficacy in a quantitative way usually requires

consideration of the three dimensions, namely, strength, magnitude, and generality. Such literature definitely has shed light on the discovery of correlations between variables and particular results, which guides following researchers in building their conceptual framework. However, certain concerns have been raised for detailing self-efficacy change. These concerns encompass that not enough attention has been given to the sources of self-efficacy (Klassen, Tze, Betts, & Gordon, 2011), that measurement methods frequently do not adequately consider the appropriate level of specificity of behaviors (Bandura, 1997; Gist & Mitchell, 1992; Pajares, 1996), that self-efficacy is frequently measured too long after the participant has experienced an informing event (Bandura, 1986; Pajares & Miller, 1994) and that data collection methods heavily rely on quantitative methods (Bandura, 1997; Wheatley, 2005). In response to these concerns, my current study employed a qualitative approach, whose strength is in "understanding the process by which phenomena take place" (Maxwell, 2013, p.232). The process of how the study abroad context shapes participants' self-efficacy beliefs in second language use and what participants' self-efficacy in second language is like were the focus of the present study. I hope my investigation will enrich the existing body of self-efficacy research by means of analyzing the interpretive data and aggregative data collected from questionnaires and interviews.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Questions and Design**

The present study has intellectual goals and practical goals, which are to

understand, extend and verify Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, and to elucidate potential overlooked issues and corresponding solutions with respect to international Chinese students' self-efficacy beliefs in English usage in the context of an English-medium university located in a city where the official language is French. Specifically, the current research looked into participant' self-assessed confidence in using English for interpersonal communication, presentational speaking, presentational writing, interpretive listening, and interpretive reading. Therefore, three open-ended questions directed the research:

1. How do international Chinese graduate students perceive their current linguistic self-efficacy beliefs in English after studying abroad for over two semesters in an English-speaking institution?
2. Do their linguistic self-efficacy beliefs influence their academic and social performances? If so, how does the influence come into play?
3. What are the major sources of the change in international Chinese students' second language self-efficacy beliefs in the study abroad context?

In pursuing an understanding of participants' self-perception and the influence of the study abroad context on international students' linguistic self-efficacy beliefs, the current research employed a research paradigm of interpretive phenomenology.

Focusing on situated understanding and socially constructed worlds, interpretive phenomenology allows qualitative researchers to understand participants' embodied experience (Benner, 2008). Researchers, as a key instrument in qualitative studies, note actions, observe contexts, and subjectively interpret data collected using their own

experiences and cultural background. Reflexive researchers usually reflect about how their own backgrounds influence interpretations while trying to develop a holistic view of the issue under study (Creswell, 2013). However, it is "participants' meanings" rather than researchers' meanings that are the focus of the entire research. In addition to being "interpretive, experience based, situational, and personalistic"(Stake, 2010, p.31), interpretive phenomenology is especially suitable for the current study in that the inquiries extend and confirm or disconfirm the researcher's understanding (Benner, 2008).

In the current study, I reflect on how the Confucian Heritage Culture that the participants and I share comes into play in shaping one's self-efficacy in second language use and learning, and how participants' lived experiences confirm or disconfirm Bandura's proposed sources of self-efficacy. The aim of interpretive phenomenological analysis, which is to explore how participants make sense of their personal and social worlds through examining participants' personal experience and personal perceptions (Smith & Osborn, 2009), is also in line with the current study's purpose to explore participants' unique self-efficacy beliefs in second language use. By bringing in this kind of humanistic dimension of SLA, I hope to clear up "complexities" in second language learning to some extent (Larsen-Freeman, 2018).

In order to better understand participants' meanings and to build up the reliability of the study, data were collected from multiple sources, a procedure commonly referred to as "triangulation" (Maxwell, 2013, p.128). Two methods of data collection were used: surveys and interviews. Survey methods were selected for the current study to gather

participants' linguistic background information and general self-efficacy beliefs in a systematic way. Interview methods were chosen to obtain description of actions and events that happened in the past (Creswell, 2013), which in the current study is participants' English usage and self-efficacy beliefs in everyday life. A combination of the two most commonly used data collection methods in the social sciences generated understanding of participants' generic linguistic self-efficacy and specific efficacy beliefs in this unique study abroad context. I will introduce the instruments and data collection procedures at more length in section 3.4, Data Collection Methods. Before diving into that, in the following section I will discuss how I negotiated the research relationships and took ethical considerations into account.

### **3.2 Participant Recruitment**

Unlike most of the study abroad literature, in which participants are US-based undergraduate students learning a foreign language (French, Russian, Spanish, or German) (Kinger, 2013), I recruited international Chinese graduate students registered in an English-medium program of a public research-intensive English university in Canada. The research site was selected for the following reasons: firstly, the university is a world-renowned institution of higher learning with 30% of students coming from over 150 countries outside Canada (Office of International Student Services, n.d., para.1); secondly, international students from China constitute the largest group in the international student body per 2018-2019 enrollment statistics (Office of International Student Services, n.d.); thirdly, the researcher is also an international student currently registered in the same program as the participants. Being a member of

the group of international Chinese graduate students myself enables me to better understand the context in which participants' linguistic self-efficacy beliefs are shaped. Since self-efficacy is an important mechanism of personal agency (Bandura, 1992), I therefore recruited graduate students as participants, given their higher levels of personal agency in comparison to learners at lower levels of education. The agency to which I refer in this study is characterized by learners' abilities to self-regulate and to be aware of their responsibility for their own actions (van Lier, 2008). As evidenced by Aro's exemplar longitudinal projects (2009, 2015) on the development of English learners' agency, younger learners' sense of agency was very subject to influence by how well their preferred learning methods matched teaching methods. When the participants grew older, they were more self-regulated and more comfortable exercising agency over the learning process. All reasons above considered, the research site and participants were appropriate for the study.

Seven participants were purposefully sampled and recruited on a voluntary basis. First, I posted the flyer (see Appendix A) with a brief introduction to the research on WeChat. The aim was to engage all international Chinese graduate students majoring in Second Language Education, but not everyone expressed an interest. Then I thoroughly introduced the study to the interested students, mostly according to the introductory script (see Appendix B). Next, I narrowed the scope of recruitment to only second-year graduate students who would have presumably adjusted to the study abroad setting better than newcomers, as the positive correlation between time spent abroad and the increase of the foreign language proficiency showed in many SA studies (e.g. Li, 2014;

Rees & Klapper, 2007). In this way, the impact on the study of participants' uneasiness about encountering a strange environment was minimized.

I then invited those participants to read and sign the consent form (see Appendix C), followed by a background questionnaire adapted from the language contact profile (Freed, Dewey, Segalowitz, and Halter, 2004). The questionnaire was distributed right after participants signed the consent form, and was gathered before the one-on-one interview started. The survey and interview sessions were conducted at participants' convenience throughout January, 2018. Every participant consented to have their organization name, McGill University, used and the interview session audio-taped, while having their own real names replaced by an alias. The seven pseudonyms, Amy, Beth, Edison, Gabrielle, Heather, Jade, and Maria, were chosen by the participants. How these participants provided me with data and how the data were analyzed will be introduced in the following subsection.

### **3.3 Data Collection Methods**

Participants were asked to review their previous written assignments and Powerpoint slides, dating back to their arrival in Canada. Prior to filling out the two questionnaires, I double-checked to make sure participants have reviewed the materials that help conjure up students' memories. Then participants filled out two paper-based questionnaires, followed by a five-minute break and a semi-structured one-on-on interview lasted for about thirty minutes.

#### **3.3.1 Survey methods.**

The present study employed paper-based surveys to generate data that reflect participants' general linguistic self-efficacy beliefs and specific efficacy beliefs in

accomplishing given tasks. Two questionnaires, prefaced with greetings and an introduction of the questions, were distributed to the participants as a prelude to interviews. The entry questionnaire—Language Contact Profile (Appendix D)—consisted of twenty-one questions grouped into two categories. The first eleven questions are about participants' demographic information and linguistic background; the final ten questions are about participants' self-assessment on their English proficiency, levels of confidence using English, and attitudes towards effort making in learning. The questions were phrased in the form of questions in English, and participants were asked to select from one of the responses (e.g. poor, fair, good, very good, native/native like; very unconfident, slightly unconfident, slightly confident, very confident) to represent their ratings.

The other survey—a series of Can-Do Statements developed by American Council Teaching of Foreign Languages, ACTFL (see Appendix E)—concretizes participants' overall self-assessment on their English with applied skills in various domains. In addition to the introductory page at the beginning of this survey, I explained to the participants the content, intention, and requirements of the survey in Chinese. To start with, participants classified their language proficiencies, using the benchmarks provided, in five fields, namely, interpersonal communication, presentational speaking, presentational writing, interpretive listening, and interpretive reading (ACTFL, 2015). Then they moved on to the corresponding page to find a list of statements under that benchmark. Each statement describes a specific language task that learners are likely to perform at that level of proficiency. For example, in Interpersonal Communication at the



Intermediate-High level, learners should have the ability to “participate with ease and confidence in conversations on familiar topics” (ACTFL, 2015, p.5). The corresponding statements include “I can ask for and provide information about specific events”, “I can ask for and provide information about a hobby or lifestyle, such as bicycling, vegetarianism, video games, or sports”, etc. (ACTFL, 2015, p.8). Next, they selected the statements that they can accomplish and left the others blank. This process of marking detailed statements served for a re-confirmation purpose regarding participants' initial self-categorization. Participants were allowed to go back and forth to modify their benchmarks if they found too few or too many statements were chosen. Another piece of blank paper was provided so that participants could jot down their memories or ideas conjured up by the statements. In case of potential questions, I stayed in the group study room with the participant while he/she was filling out the questionnaires.

There was a ten-minute break after participants finished the second questionnaire, which I used to go over the participants' responses in the questionnaires and notes. I made an attempt to pose inquiries to participants in an individualized way. Besides the list of pre-designed list of questions guiding the semi-structured interview (see Appendix F), I generated some questions tailored to participants' feedback. In addition, participants' performance and feelings when filling out the questionnaire, such as hesitation, were also discussed in the subsequent interview.

### **3.3.2 Interview methods.**

To complement the closed-ended questionnaires, I conducted semi-structured, audio-recorded, one-on-one interviews with the same participants from the survey

session. They were given a pre-interview “assignment”: to review their personal documents (diaries, posts, pictures, papers, slides, etc.) dating back to the beginning of the study at the institution. If they were not able to finish the assignment beforehand, they would bring their laptop or other devices in so that they could briefly look back to the more than one-year study abroad journey. Therefore, the interview happened after the review or immediately after the ten-minute break depending on the situation. All the participants agreed to be interviewed in quiet group study rooms in a library on campus. Subject to the availability of the participant, the interview either happened on weekend or weekday evenings in January, 2018. Even though I informed participants that the interview would last about thirty minutes, no hard limit on time was imposed on participants. The actual duration of interviews varied from twenty-two to thirty-seven minutes. Every participant preferred to be interviewed in Chinese, but some interviews included certain phrases and quotations in English.

As mentioned in the previous section, I drafted a list of interview questions that could facilitate the elicitation of more research-question-related information from participants (Appendix F), but we also welcomed the divergence from the planned path to emerging relevant topics. Given the open-ended nature of most of the questions, participants enjoyed much freedom to lead the conversation, such as the discussion of learning and using French on and off campus. Beginning with an extension of the survey, I asked participants to elaborate on the rationale behind their decision-making and their opinions about the instrument. Interviewees were then invited to share their memories conjured up by the scenarios in the Can-Do Statements.

### 3.4 Data Analysis Methods

To organize and analyze the data collected from questionnaires, I adopted tables to present participants' demographic information and self-assessed confidence in certain language usage; a bar graph to present participants' original and modified self-rating in Can-Do Statements. A table is suitable to represent participants' demographic information such as age, native language, and previous study/live abroad experiences, because it made the similarities and differences in participants' background obvious. A bar graph is appropriate to represent participants' self-assigned benchmarks, because all the participants went back and forth to modify their original benchmarks after reading the detailed statements under each benchmark. Such alteration can be fully embodied in the varied heights of the rectangular bars. Besides, participants' ratings in the five aspects of English usage, namely, Interpersonal Communication, Presentational Speaking, Presentational Writing, Interpretive Listening, and Interpretive Reading, are categorical and discrete, thus the bar graph was adopted (Kelley & Donnelly, 2009).

To analyze the data collected from interviews, I used coding and thematic analysis strategies. I first independently transcribed the seven interviews in full, yielding data which were then coded by hand. Specifically, I did descriptive coding to "assign labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase" (Miles et al., 2014, p.74); I did values coding to reflect participants' "values, attitudes, and beliefs" (Miles et al., 2014, p.75); I also did In Vivo coding on paper, which means to "use words or short phrases from the participant's own language in the data as codes" (Miles et al., 2014, p.74). Then I filled out the modified version of Miles and Huberman's (1994) Contact Summary Form in a

Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, with participants' names in the first row, page number on the second row, salient points/codes in the third row, and themes/aspects in the fourth row (see Figure 1 for an excerpt). Then I used the filter function in Microsoft Excel to look for common occurrences of words in themes. In addition, I reflected on how these emerging themes related to my research questions, using my own analytic memos on paper. As for the language choice, the interview transcript was in Chinese, but the codes I wrote in the margin and the analytic memos I kept in the notebook was in English. The translation of participants' speech in Chinese to English was done solely by me, a Chinese native speaker and a competent English second-language speaker.



	A	B	C	D
1	Participant	Page	Salient Points / Codes	Themes/Aspects
2	Heather	1	deduction based on experiences leads to conservativeness	MASTERY EXPERIENCES
3	Heather	1	insignificant progress	SELF-PERCEIVED PROGRESS
4	Heather	1	looking for middle ground, conservative	PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS
5	Heather	1	reluctance to admit being "good"	LACK OF CONFIDENCE
6	Heather	1	reasons for such reluctance	LACK OF CONFIDENCE

*Figure 1.* Contact summary form: Illustration with coded themes

The interviews, ranging from 22 minutes 12 seconds to 37 minutes 17 seconds, together with the results in the survey generated significant illuminating insight into participants' linguistic self-efficacy beliefs (LSE) in English. The next chapter is going to unveil how participants' LSE changed in the linguistically complex SA environment, with their English, learned as a foreign language, now being used as the dominant language in their life.

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations and Negotiating Research Relationships

Before negotiating the research partnership with the target group, I obtained ethics approval from McGill University's Research Ethics Board II, which stipulated that I inform participants and process data in specific ways. Then I clearly explained the

purpose of the study, procedures, and data dissemination to the participants so that I gained information ethically. In return for participants' time devoted to participating in the study, I listened to the participants with as much empathy as I could, and provided light refreshments during the interview sessions. Even though participants lost some personal time through being involved in my study, my participants generally felt this was a worthwhile cause and they wanted their voice to be heard. They expressed such interest in participating in a group chat on WeChat (a social media application widely used among Chinese) before the study formally started, and they also showed great enthusiasm for reading my thesis after the study finished. After the data collection phase, I sent each participant a thank-you email to show my genuine appreciation for their time and honesty.

In addition to the researcher-participant relationship, the participants and I were also from the same cohort, and had taken courses in a graduate program in second language education together. Relationships between researcher and participants are essential in qualitative research, because a trustworthy relationship grants researchers access to the setting and allows researchers to obtain information pertaining to research questions (Maxwell, 2013). Nevertheless, the amount of rapport and the level of participants' openness are not the only standards of a good research relationship. If participants are not thinking critically about the questions posed to them, they will not be able to give useful information about what researchers want to study. Therefore, I narrowed my target participant group to those who not only trust me, but also have relatively higher language awareness. I purposefully excluded students who have not

taken any courses in Second Language Education (SLE). The language awareness I referred to is defined as “explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use” (Association for Language Awareness, n.d., para. 1). Considering the SLE courses offered at the research site, high English language proficiency and relevant teaching experience required by the departmental admission procedures, as well as the equal power relationship between my targeted participants and me, students from my cohort seemed to be the most suitable candidates from whom I could gain information with a bearing upon my research questions. The invaluable information these participants provided is going to be presented in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

The current chapter presents the results generated by the interviews and the questionnaires entitled *The Language Contact Profile – Entry Questionnaire* (hereafter referred to as “the Questionnaire”) and *NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements* (hereafter referred to as “the Statements”). Beginning with the participants’ demographic information in tabular form, the first subsection introduces participants’ linguistic background. Subsequently, participants’ general self-assessments of their progress, confidence, and performance in certain English usages were presented and analyzed according to the responses in the Questionnaire, self-assigned NCSSFL-ACTFL global benchmarks, and interview excerpts. Since some participants modified their original self-assigned benchmarks after reading the detailed Can-Do statements, the results of the Statements are presented in a bar graph to reflect these changes. The changes were then examined with participants’ narratives in the

interview for emerging themes. Four themes emerged in the interview excerpts, namely, self-perception of English usage; influential factors in the change of linguistic self-efficacy beliefs (LSE); engagement in meaningful communicative practice; and investment in improving LSE.

First, self-perception of English usage included participants' self-evaluation of confidence, performance, and progress in using English language in everyday life in the SA context. Second, influential factors in the change of LSE brought together the influence of participants' mastery experiences, social/verbal persuasion, and emotional states on their LSE. Third, engagement in meaningful communicative practice was made up of participants' speech spontaneity, English usage outside of classroom, and the interplay of identity and culture. Fourth, investment in improving LSE consisted of the discussion of the efforts participants devoted into advancing their LSE and English proficiency in general, together with participants' suggestions for elevating international Chinese students' LSE.

Despite the slight difference between self-efficacy and self-confidence (Bandura, 1977), I re-stated questions with "confidence in accomplishing something" in placement of "efficacy" when participants appeared to have trouble following what I meant. The nuance between the two constructs is negligible since it has little to do with the study purpose.

#### **4.1 Demographic Information**

The first eleven questions of the Questionnaire were created to collect participants' demographic information related to the research questions. These questions also examined participants' general English learning background and whether participants have any previous studying or living abroad experiences. Table 2, below, displays participants' responses in the first section of the Questionnaire.

Table 2.

*Biographical information and linguistic background*

Items \ Pseudonyms	Heather	Amy	Beth	Jade	Gabrielle	Edison	Maria
Gender	female	female	female	female	female	male	female
Age	24	24	24	25	26	30	27
Country of birth	China	China	China	China	Taiwan	China	China
Native language	Chinese	Chinese	Cantonese	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese
Language spoken at home	Chinese	Chinese	Cantonese	Chinese	Taiwanese	Chinese	Chinese
Language for the majority of education	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese
Previous SA experiences in an English-speaking region for over six months	N/A	US 6 months	N/A	US 1 year	N/A	N/A	N/A
Other study or work or live abroad experiences	N/A	N/A	Canada 1 month	Ireland 1 year	South Korea 1 year	N/A	Spain 10 months
Length of English study at school	18	20	12.5	20	20	12	17
TOEFL/IELTS scores at admission to the current program	IELTS 7.5	IELTS 7.5	TOEFL 97	TOEFL 101	TOEFL 105	IELTS 8	TOEFL 112

Six female participants, Heather, Amy, Beth, Jade, Gabrielle, and Maria, and one male participant, Edison, took part in the research. The imbalance of the gender ratio in the



current study resembles the common imbalance of gender ratio imbalance among most education-related programs. All participants were 24-30 years old and in their second academic year when the research was conducted. With the exception of Gabrielle, who was born in Taiwan, all the other six participants were born in mainland China. Chinese is the language that all participants received the majority of their education in, and the native language for all participants. Five out of the seven participants had study, work or live abroad experiences ranging from one month to two years, be it in an English-speaking country or not. I further inquired about when such experiences happened and was told that they did not happen in the year prior to participants' enrolment in McGill. To meet the requirement of admission, all participants have obtained high scores in IELTS or TOEFL, with 7.5 to 8 and 97 to 112 respectively. They also have spent considerable time — twelve to twenty years — learning English in a formal school setting. In addition to the aforementioned objective facts about participants' English learning background, how the participants subjectively felt about their English proficiency and usage in real life was examined in the Questionnaire as well. The responses to Question 12-21 are displayed in the subsequent subsections, analyzed together with interview excerpts.

## **4.2 Self-Perceptions of English Usage**

### **4.2.1 Self-perceived progress.**

The present subsection explores participants' self-perceived progress in English proficiencies by examining three relevant questions in the Questionnaire and the subsequent interviews. Item 12, 13 and 21 in the Questionnaire inquired participants' self-rated previous,

current, and future English proficiency levels. The results of the three items are displayed in the following table.

Table 3.

*Self-assessment of English proficiencies*

Items \ Pseudonyms	Heather	Amy	Beth	Jade	Gabrielle	Edison	Maria
Self-rated English proficiency level upon arrival	Fair	Good	Fair	Very good	Very good	Good	Good
Current self-assessed English proficiency level	Fair	Good	Good	Native/ Nativelike	Very Good	Very Good	Good
Foreseeable changes in your English proficiency for the rest of your stay	It may be better.	It may not change much.	It may be better.	It may be better.	It may be better.	It may not change much.	It may not change much.

Three participants — Beth, Jade, and Edison — indicated their English proficiency has progressed from one level to the next since the beginning of study abroad. In comparison, the other four participants— Heather, Amy, Gabrielle, and Maria — regarded their current proficiencies as being at the same level as when they first came to Canada. Interestingly, whether participants thought their English proficiency levels have been static or not did not coincide with whether they held a positive view towards the projected progress. Four participants — Heather, Beth, Jade, and Gabrielle — believed their English may be better for the rest of their stay. By contrast, the other three participants — Amy, Edison, and Maria — did not think their English proficiency will change much.

Participants then explained their choices in the Questionnaire in the subsequent interviews. Among those who suggested that they have made significant progress since their arrival, Jade perceived her improvement in increased understanding of the lectures and better communication with others in English.

At the beginning of my life in Canada, I had some difficulties using English in daily life and understanding some professors' lectures. Gradually, I have adapted (to lectures) and to communication with others (in English). So I feel (my current proficiency) is better than before. [...] My English abilities have improved a lot. -*Jade*

Similarly, Edison, who rated his current English proficiency level as higher than before, indicated that he had made some progress since arrival:

My progress is not very (significant)...but I've definitely made some progress. -*Edison*

In comparison, Beth perceived her progress from the comments on her English given by other interlocutors:

The comments I received are mostly positive. For example, when someone chatted with me on the way and they noticed that I am Asian, I told them 'Actually you know I'm Chinese'. Then they said something like 'Oh, your English is so good'. Then I replied 'Many Chinese's English are good now'. Yeah, it does happen. -*Beth*

Even though the other four participants regarded their current English as the same as their previous level, they pointed out in the interview that they have improved in certain respects, but such improvement was not significant enough for their self-ranking to move upward a level. Heather, for example, explained her choices in the Questionnaire as following:

The two 'fair's I responded in the Questionnaire don't mean the same. But I don't want to go with 'good'. Had the choice been broken down to Likert scales, I'd have rated my current proficiency with 0.5 level higher than the previous one. -*Heather*

Likewise, the other three participants believed they have progressed significantly in some but not all skills. While speaking presented to be the most controversial area, reading and writing were generally agreed on as the fields where participants observed remarkable

improvement. For instance, Amy ascribed her progress in writing to abundant practice and her oral English being static to inadequate practice:

My writing is better than before, thanks to the larger volume of assignments here. [...] I progressed little in oral English, because there is so little time for one to talk. The time I spent on speaking English here is even less than when I was in China. [...] Anyway, since we've taken so many courses (in English), it's impossible that we have made no progress at all. Moreover, the environment requires you to use English. -*Amy*

Amy's opinion was echoed by Maria, who also perceived improvement in her writing and reading abilities rather than speaking:

I can feel my progress in reading and writing. [...] I became better at reading skills such as skimming and scanning. [...] As for writing, I recognized my advancement in helping a friend to revise his work. [...] I realized my logic and reasoning in writing indeed improved. However, I don't think my speaking ability has improved. -*Maria*

On the contrary, Gabrielle suggested she had indeed improved in oral English:

I feel my speaking has been progressing. But all Quebecois here speak French, I could actually have been better (had I been in an English-speaking environment). -*Gabrielle*

In summary, the results presented in this subsection illustrate participants' complex self-perceptions about their improvement in English proficiency. Generally speaking, participants were divided as to whether they have made significant progress in overall English proficiencies. Nevertheless, they did notice some improvement in certain linguistic skills. Where the improvement was observed and whether the progress was significant enough for the participant varied from person to person. Participants were especially divided as to whether their speaking abilities have increased.

#### **4.2.2 Self-perceived confidence.**

The present subsection looks into participants' self-perceived confidence by examining five relevant questions in the Questionnaire and the subsequent interviews. Item

14 – 18 in the Questionnaire asked the participants about their confidence in specific language usage in five respects, corresponding to the ensuing ACTFL Global benchmarks.

Presented in Table 4 and Figure 2 below, participants' responses are analyzed within the Questionnaire and the Statement respectively, then further interpreted across the instruments.

Table 4.

*Self-assessment of confidence in English usage*

Pseudonyms Items	Heather	Amy	Beth	Jade	Gabrielle	Edison	Maria
Confidence in conversing with others in a person-to-person situation	Slightly unconfident	Slightly confident	Slightly confident	Very confident	Very confident	Very confident	Slightly confident
Confidence in giving a presentation in English	Slightly unconfident	Slightly unconfident	Slightly unconfident	Slightly unconfident	Very confident	Slightly confident	Slightly unconfident
Confidence in writing in English for general interest and academic purposes	Slightly confident	Slightly unconfident	Slightly confident	Slightly unconfident	Slightly unconfident	Slightly confident	Slightly unconfident
Confidence in following English used in daily life and lectures	Slightly confident	Slightly confident	Slightly unconfident	Very confident	Very confident	Very confident	Slightly unconfident
Confidence in understanding English reading materials	Slightly confident	Slightly confident	Slightly confident	Slightly unconfident	Slightly confident	Slightly confident	Slightly unconfident

Regardless of participants' self-assessed overall proficiency levels, ranging from fair to native/nativelike, all but one participant indicated they had at least one aspect in which they feel "slightly unconfident" while in more detailed self-evaluation of English use. Specifically, participants were provided with five aspects to reflect on: confidence in conversing in a person-to-person situation, in giving a presentation, in writing about their ideas for both general interest and academic purposes, in following English used in daily life and lectures, and in understanding English reading materials. Understandably, the evaluation results vary because of individual differences, but English use in giving a presentation and writing proved to be the two aspects that most participants were unconfident about. In other words, participants have relatively low self-efficacy in these two areas. Only four options, "very unconfident", "slightly unconfident", "slightly confident", and "very confident", were provided in the Questionnaire. Whether participants' self-perceptions would change given a more specific instrument was explored with the Statements.

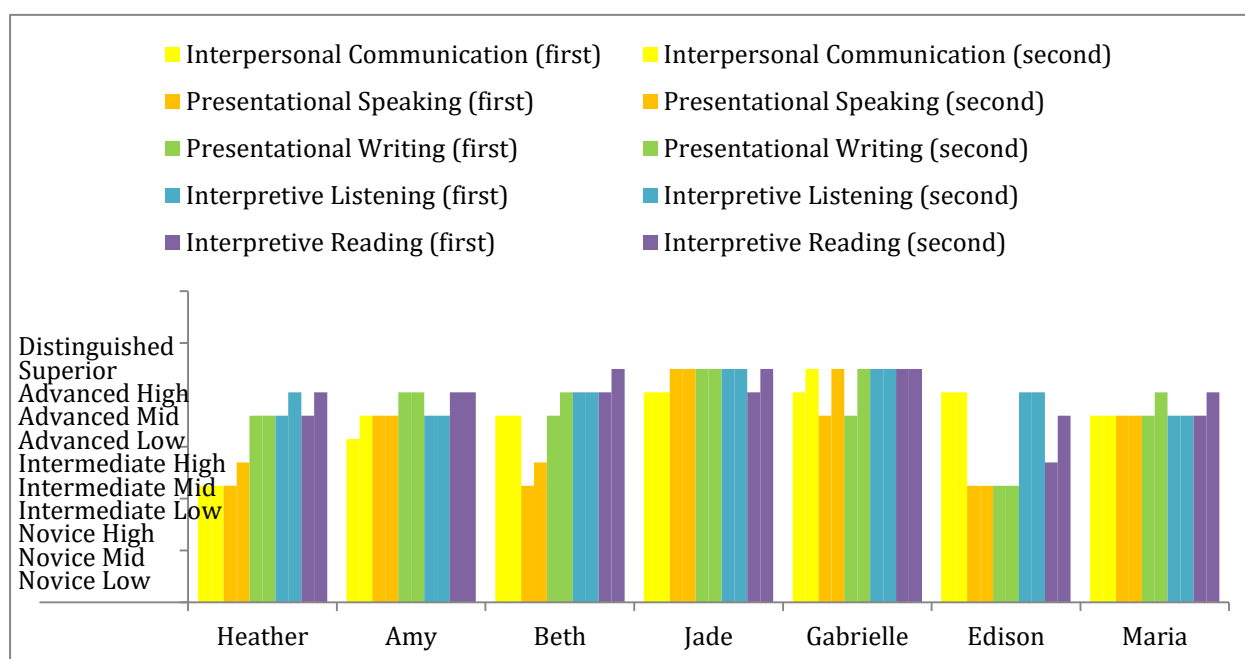


Figure 2. Participants' self-rated ACTFL global benchmarks

Extended from the four general options for confidence levels in English use in the Questionnaire to eleven more specific benchmarks in the Statements, the multiple rounds of reflection helped participants gain a new understanding of their self-efficacy beliefs. In the Statements, participants were invited to categorize themselves into one benchmark Interpersonal Communication, Presentational Speaking, Presentational Writing, Interpretive Listening, and Interpretive Reading, which were represented by the yellow, orange, green, blue, and purple bars respectively in Figure 2. Participants' results displayed more variance thanks to the relatively large number of benchmarks with smaller intervals in between and the descriptive statement following each benchmark. As can be seen in Figure 2, the lowest benchmark selected regarding Interpersonal Communication (the yellow bar), was Intermediate Mid (the fifth benchmark), and the highest benchmark selected was Superior (the tenth benchmark). Such notable difference was also found in Presentational Speaking (the orange bar) and Presentational Writing (the green bar). In addition, some participants modified their self-assessed benchmarks on the first round after reading the detailed scenarios following each benchmark, hence the self-assessed benchmarks on the second round in the same color as the ones on the first round but of different heights. Such fluctuation can be observed in every participant's choice in at least one out of the five areas. Heather, Beth, and Gabrielle changed their benchmarks in three areas out of five.

In comparing participants' responses in the Statements and the Questionnaire, I found Heather's and Edison's responses in the Statements consistent, whereas the other five participants' showed certain discrepancies. The discrepancies I refer to here mean that the rankings of their confidence level in the five aspects are not in accordance with the ensuing

benchmarks. By “consistent” here I mean that the aspects about which participants were confident received a higher benchmark than the aspects about which participants were unconfident. To be specific, Heather suggested that she was “Slightly Unconfident” about Interpersonal Communication and Presentational Speaking in the Questionnaire, and these two fields also received a lower benchmark than the other three fields. The representation in the figure is that the yellow and orange bars are lower than the other three bars. The same is true for Edison. The other five participants' responses in the Statements conflicted with their self-assessments on at least one entry in the Questionnaire. For example, Amy felt “Slightly Unconfident” in Presentational Speaking (the orange bar) and Presentational Writing (the green bar), yet “Slightly Confident” in Interpersonal Communication (the yellow bar). Nevertheless, the yellow bar is not higher than the orange bar and the green bar. Similar contradiction can be found in Beth's responses in Interpretive Listening and Presentational Writing; Maria's Presentational Speaking and, Gabrielle's Presentational Speaking and Presentational Writing. An even more noticeable disagreement was observed in Jade's results. The three items in which she evaluated as “Slightly Unconfident”, namely, Presentational Speaking, Presentational Writing, and Interpretive Reading, were assigned to the top benchmark Superior in the Statements.

In summary, participants held varied levels of confidence in different English usages. Besides, even the evaluation of the very same English usage differed over the multiples rounds of self-assessment in instruments with disparate specificities. The overall underestimating trend in self-rated LSE was obvious. The following subsections are going to introduce what led to this trend and the manifestation of LSE in participants' real life. .



### 4.2.3 Self-perceived performance.

The current subsection explored participants' self-evaluation of their performances in using English for academic and non-academic purposes. The open-ended questions in the semi-structured interviews guided participants to talk about written assignments and oral presentations, which constituted the main topics for academic usage. The scenarios in the Statements prompted participants to think about other memorable non-academic activities carried out in English. What drew my attention were the evaluative codes, such as “good”, “terrible”, and “awful”, throughout participants' transcripts.

Just as participants' LSE varied, their self-assessment of the performance in English usage differed from person to person as well. Basically, participants' narratives corroborated their responses in the survey. For example, Heather expressed low LSE in Presentational Speaking, and she commented on her performance in the first presentation as below:

My first presentation was awful. [...] It was a total disaster. - *Heather*

Similarly, Amy's described her lack of confidence in English writing in light of previous experiences in tests and future career path:

I took IELTS several times in order to get a satisfactory score in Writing. I haven't been good at writing since I was a kid. [...] Therefore, I cannot go for a career in academic fields. The requirement for writing is too high. - *Amy*

Likewise, Beth indicated low LSE in Interpersonal Communication in the survey, and she explained her choice as the following:

When speaking of some topics beyond the scope of daily conversations, I am aware that my English is insufficient. For instance, I cannot express my viewpoints thoroughly in class. [...] Also, when we talk about religion or politics, or when I go for a doctor's appointment, my vocabulary would then turn to be inadequate. In other words, my English is not good enough for circumstances unfamiliar to me. - *Beth*

In a similar vein, Jade and Gabrielle clarified that their written English was not as good as their oral English, which was in line with their abundant confidence in speaking and insufficient confidence in writing and reading in the Questionnaire.

My oral English has been good, so the professors in my undergraduate studies used to label me as having a high proficiency in English overall. However, that's not true. My reading and writing are not as good as my speaking. – *Jade*

To me, speaking is easier than writing. I don't know how to write very well and my diction and phrasing are relatively weak, so it usually takes me quite a while to write something. [...] Even now I am still afraid of academic writing. [...] My speaking may be not that good, but it's fine. [...] Presentation has been fine too for me, while writing has been indeed a significant issue. – *Gabrielle*

By comparison, Edison, who indicated being confident in all the five fields of English usage, showed ease about handling varieties of English-related tasks.

I think I have a relatively wide vocabulary. [...] I can basically understand all the words used in daily life. [...] I can always get the main idea of the assigned reading materials very precisely. Maybe I don't know some words in the article, but that doesn't hinder my understanding of the paper. [...] My everyday communication in English mostly goes very smoothly. [...] I am very used to free talks as well. [...] My performance [in the first presentation at McGill] was even better than expected. [...] I did very well in other courses too, including different forms of assignments, such as blogs. – *Edison*

In summary, participants tended to have a positive evaluation of their performance in English-related tasks in which their self-efficacy beliefs were affirmative, and vice versa. Now that various experiences were mentioned in the interview, what counted as the influential factors in shaping participants' LSE was worthy of exploration. The following subsection presents the three most salient elements in the change of participants' LSE.

#### **4.3 Influential Factors in the Change of LSE**

Participants' LSE not only influenced their self-perceptions of their English-related experiences, but also were shaped by such experiences. In looking for the themes among

participants' responses in the interview, I divided the relevant data into three categories, partially following Bandura's (1997) proposed model: mastery experiences, social/verbal persuasion, and emotional states.

#### **4.3.1 Mastery experiences.**

Mastery experiences presented to be one of the most direct factors influencing one's self-efficacy beliefs, while what counted as such mastery experiences was really up to the participants themselves. Besides, successful and failed events equally impacted participants' LSE. The current section looked into significant or insignificant experiences in changing participants' LSE, including language proficiency tests, communication with others, and work experiences.

Having scored high enough in language proficiency tests to be enrolled in the Faculty of Education at McGill did not seem to matter a lot to the participants. They downplayed or even negated the value of their initial achievement in tests explicitly and unanimously. Several participants argued that tests are an inefficient source of self-efficacy, because test-takers can prepare in advance and even re-take the tests multiple times if needed. Therefore, it's hard to tell whether the final satisfactory scores are a demonstration of improved linguistic abilities or a result of honed test skills, such as better time management and increased familiarity with the pattern of the questions in the test. To be specific, Amy, Jade, Gabrielle, and Edison expressed their distrust in tests and the little slight influence of grades on their self-efficacy beliefs:

I just got 7.5 in IELTS, and I took the test multiple times. - *Amy*

I don't really pay much attention to the scores of tests. [...] Besides, I actually have taken TOEFL several times, which makes the score even more unconvincing. What's

more, TOEFL is special in its computer-based testing format, unlike the face-to-face speaking section in IELTS. Some people may be nervous about dealing with computers, thus their performance is influenced. – *Jade*

I could have scored higher (in TOEFL). Asian students' speaking was generally underrated back then, which must be below 26 (out of 30). 24 was already a pretty decent score. But now I think I can score over 110 (out of 120). - *Gabrielle*

I don't think the score has affected me in any way, [...], because the work handed in for the tests must have been revised several times. One gets the chance to review in taking tests. Nevertheless, I think daily communication with others can indeed reflect a person's authentic level. – *Edison*

Maria also indicated she personally did not believe such score equal to one's abilities in using the language, but she believed test scores proved to be the first impression on other people about one's proficiency level of the language.

I think the score of the test influenced my linguistic self-efficacy beliefs to some extent, because the score I got looks pretty good after all. Even though my reason tells me that one's grades in English bear no direct relation to one's language ability, but it is also true that the score is indeed many people's first impression and recognition of your abilities in English. So when someone asked how much I scored in IELTS or TOEFL in order to learn about my English proficiency, I am rather confident. - *Maria*

In comparison, smooth and effective or difficult and disturbed communication with others signified much to participants. Such experiences provided participants with a sense of their voice heard or themselves blended in the foreign culture, which greatly promoted their LSE. Jade and Heather brought up memories of how their opinions were entertained by professor or peers respectively:

Speaking of experiences that boost my self-efficacy beliefs, there is one thing of which I was so proud [...]. We talked about what we think of international students' brilliant ideas yet expressed in poor grammar in class. Then I commented that we should break the issue down. We shouldn't associate bad grammar with low overall abilities, thus totally ignore their ideas. Considering the various backgrounds students come from, one ought not to assume everyone speaks perfect English. Later, the professor provided very positive feedback on my opinion. He said that he hadn't

realized the issue until I mentioned it. In addition, he even modified the grading criteria because of my comments. At that time, I felt wow, here comes the real boon for international students. - *Jade*

I think it is each conversation [in English that mattered to my linguistic self-efficacy beliefs]. [...] For example, it was almost effortless for me to click with Daisy's roommate. Then we kept on talking a lot, including some rather personal opinions towards life, things, and the world. Such rather easy communication in the format of chatting definitely elevated my self-efficacy beliefs significantly. [...] Nevertheless, I am that type of slow person. I have to think it over before I can engage in the group discussion. Sometimes even when other people are discussing in full swing, I am still contemplating. When I am finally ready to say something, I don't know how to join the conversation. [...] Such little participation in gatherings lowered my self-efficacy. Therefore, my overall linguistic self-efficacy beliefs often go up and down. - *Heather*

Other than the above-mentioned participants' mastery experiences as test takers, students, and friends, work experiences where using English in an authentic context was required turned out to be an empowering resource. For instance, Beth shared how her confidence in using English increased after she managed to build rapport with foreign friends and learned more about the foreign culture:

I had an internship, during which I needed to help those foreign students with translation. [...] During that whole month, I was managing students' affairs as an assistant in a Chinese learning program. All the students who participated in that program were foreigners, with whom I spent every day. In this way, I learned what their culture is like, what their lifestyle is like, and what they enjoy. Therefore, this is the first time that I felt I blended into a circle. Later I took another position as a teaching assistant, so I needed to give lessons frequently. Now I feel much better than before, I think (my self-efficacy) has multiplied. - *Beth*

In a similar vein, Edison, who had a teaching job prior to coming abroad and who also teaches at a local school at the moment, shared how his previous working experience equipped him with the necessary confidence and conversational skills for dealing with unexpected chats at the current position:

Before coming here, I used to be a colleague of many foreign teachers at the school I previously worked for. I had no trouble communicating with them regardless in

professional teaching or in various free talk. [...] Thanks to such an opportunity at home, my transition to the life abroad was rather smooth. [...] Now I am used to it [free talk in English]. [...] Even including dealing with those kids I teach right now, they can talk about whatever no matter when. Sometimes I am not totally clear about certain words, but I can still give responses. - *Edison*

In summary, participants credited various mastery experiences with different values, which thus cast varying effects on their linguistic self-efficacy beliefs. The effects of performance on tests were not substantial in magnitude. In contrast, using English in an authentic context, such as at work or in group discussion, exerted enormous influence over participants' conversation skills as well as confidence in the usage of foreign language. Moreover, accumulating knowledge about the foreign culture generally took on a considerable significance for these participants.

#### **4.3.2 Social/Verbal persuasion.**

In the previous discussion of the mastery experiences where other interlocutors, say, peers or professors, were involved, participants suggested how those interlocutors' response in the communication also mattered a great deal to their self-reflection. The current subsection looked into specifically what professors' or peers' feedback meant to the participants and how such verbal/social persuasion played a determining role in their LSE. The feedback discussed included not only written and oral comments on their academic performance but also the body language and implied attitudes of the interlocutors in the communication.

The preference given to and the value placed on professors' or peers' feedback varied from one participant to another. For instance, Amy, Edison, and Jade attached considerable significance to professors' feedback.

Professors' feedback is the most direct and the only source (of my self-efficacy beliefs) [...] I don't care about peers' non-targeted feedback that much. It is too generic. - *Amy*

Personally speaking, the most influential factor remained to be others' comments. If a professor were to tell me that my grammar is problematic, or that I need to do so-and-so (to improve my English), I would feel really frustrated. [...] Even though the professor did not explicitly comment on my usage of grammar when I handed in my paper, looking at the revision he made in that paper still frustrated me somehow. - *Edison*

So far, feedback I received from others has been the most influential factor. But to what extent can feedback affect me varied. For instance, it really frustrates me to receive negative feedback from a reasonable professor. Nevertheless, if the negative feedback is from a biased professor, I may not care much. - *Jade*

At the same time, Maria, Beth, and Gabrielle cared about any feedback given by the general public, including but not limited to professors. Verbal encouragement and facial expressions proved to be instrumental in participants' LSE as well.

It really depends on the response given by my fellow classmates. For example, some classmates cheered me up before I went up the stage, and they said my presentation was well done after I finished. [...] I was more confident when there was more positive feedback. - *Maria*

I think it's other people's confirmation [that affected my LSE]. [...] Since there are no more exams, I discovered how my English was mostly from other people's eyes. - *Beth*

The determinant of my self-efficacy beliefs must be other people's comments and response, including their facial expressions during conversations with me. - *Gabrielle*

Where the focal point of the received feedback lay also varied from person to person. For some participants, the feedback they got was more about the subject matter. For others, the feedback was more about the language usage, which was usually related to negatively influence on participants' LSE. The question about how much attention professors should allocate to these two areas respectively was raised.

Edison, Beth, and Amy mentioned the mostly positive feedback they received in the following excerpts:

Most of the feedback on my assignments was positive. I haven't received any comments about my grammar usage. The feedback mainly centered on my understanding about the subject. [...] It is true that there remained some grammatical issues in my English use for sure, but those trivialities are rather negligible when looking at the big picture. – *Edison*

Most feedback I received was positive. [...] It occurred to me that a professor praised my partner and me for presentation skills, but he also mentioned that our analysis was not thorough enough. [...] [As for written assignments,] I have never received feedback suggesting me to take the Graphos course<sup>1</sup>, or that my grammar or phrasing is bad. The feedback was primarily on content. Or maybe the professors have become so used to our way of writing that they don't even bother to talk about it. – *Beth*

Another professor kept nodding when I was presenting, which meant she followed what I was talking about. [...] The feedback I received after the presentation was alright. I still remember that the professor remarked on the lengths of our sentences. [...] After the presentation I learned that it was not that hard to meet professors' high requirements as long as we are clear about their expectations [...] I haven't been nervous for presentations since then. – *Amy*

By comparison, the feedback which participants perceived as negative and LSE-impairing was principally related to the open discussion of the usage of the English language. Maria, Heather, Gabrielle, and Amy shared the unforgettable comments they received below:

I think correcting grammatical mistakes is an unnecessary task for professors and it goes way beyond professors' working scope. Professors pay more attention to the content knowledge [showed in the assignments], but they are nice enough to help us correct the grammatical errors nevertheless. Still the feedback remains frustrating, because I don't know how I can improve so that I can write a paper without that many errors. – *Maria*

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<sup>1</sup> Graphos courses are in-house courses offered by the writing center of the institution, aiming to teach graduate students and postdocs how to become accomplished scholarly communicators. The courses cover pronunciation, presentation, and academic writing.



The feedback I received [on the most memorable presentation] was that I still need to keep working hard. It was [long pause]... more than just content. If it's just the content that had been taken into consideration, I think [the feedback] would have been better, but there were also certain requirements for language and expression. [...] No matter what kind of euphemism [professors] adopted, certain issues did exist [in my English usage] in nature. - *Heather*

The professor wrote very straightforwardly that my English was not good enough. She suggested that we should go to the Writing Center to take Graphos courses. That really shattered my confidence. [...] Isn't what I learned from this this course that is the most substantial? I was wondering about that question when I received the negative comments on my written assignments.- *Gabrielle*

The professor frequently commented that our [English] language [usage] was not satisfactory enough, or that the punctuation was misused, or such and such. We are not native speakers, for sure we would make mistakes here and there, right? Besides, other professors didn't give me comments like that at all. [...] Another professor kept nodding when I was presenting, which meant she followed what I was talking about. [...] - *Amy*

Regardless of whether the focus the feedback was about the subject matter or the language usage of the participant's work or speech, participants' narratives also reflected that specific, constructive and evidence-based feedback was convincing and helpful, while perfunctory and undetailed feedback did little but discourage them.

The negative feedback I have received was the one simply saying my work was bad without pointing out where and why it was bad. The professor denied my work in a few sentences. Then I did not take the professor's feedback that seriously, because I felt the professor's own attitude was not serious enough to start with. [...] In comparison, another professor indicated that I needed to be more specific in certain parts. [...] They clearly specified what I did not do well. Only in this way can I accept. - *Jade*

I don't think that professor reviewed my paper carefully. Her comments consisted of three lines in total, just three lines. Then she gave me a terrible grade. - *Gabrielle*

Some professor would just say that my work was flawed, instead of informing me where the flaw was specifically. But another professor would also tell me not only what my error is, but also how it should be. [...] I felt the first professor I mentioned is just picky, but she did not offer enough help to students. - *Amy*

In addition to the school setting, Edison, Maria, and Beth brought up some noteworthy comments they received from friends or other acquaintances. As showed in the following excerpts, most of these comments stated or implied participants' communicative competence, hence conducive to the growth of LSE:

It occurred to me that the janitor of our building talked to my wife and me in different manners. I hadn't noticed that until my wife told me at one point that the janitor would slow his speed of speech when talking to her, while he would not do that when talking to me. He must have treated me as a native (speaker). – *Edison*

The participants in the language exchange club were generally rather nice. They would compliment me on my speech. [...] I don't know if it's their culture (that made them to praise others habitually), so I always adopt a doubtful attitude. [...] I felt that I have to give certain discount on their compliment before taking it in. Otherwise, constant praise would easily turn me overconfident. - *Maria*

As far as I recall, my friends commented that my vocabulary wasn't that large, [...], and that I detoured to describe the word which I want to use but is not in my vocabulary. [...] Nevertheless, the punctuation in my speech was pretty good, so people can follow what I am talking about. This is probably because of my satisfactory communicative competence. - *Beth*

In summary, participants valued social/verbal persuasion from professors, peers, and even acquaintances, which served as a reflection of their linguistic abilities and an important source of their self-efficacy beliefs. Regardless of the feedback being positive or negative, or what form it takes, evidence-based and detailed feedback enjoyed a wide acceptance among participants. The nature of the emotional responses the feedback brought forth from the participants is going to be introduced in the following subsection.

#### **4.3.3 Emotional states.**

Speaking of the performance and the feedback received on previous academic tasks, participants also shared the emotions they experienced. The current subsection included

participants' feelings in preparing for the assignments, in the middle of the practice, and after finishing the projects. Participants indicated varied feelings towards oral and written assignments, just as they held varied LSE in different English usage. Besides, what led to these emotional changes was discussed.

On one hand, participants expressed different emotions about varied matters in their memorable tasks where spoken English was required. Heather described the way her emotions roller-skated throughout the presentation, which dovetailed with her slight unconfidence in English use in giving presentations:

I am very anxious when it comes close to the time to present. Actually I feel there is a lot to talk about and I also have some personal ideas [about the topic] during the preparation, thus looking forward to the presentation with excitement. Then, when it comes to the time to present, when you are on the stage, as you are presenting, you cling to the script. You feel nervous at the beginning. [...] I was so nervous that my voice was trembling [during my first presentation]. - *Heather*

Similarly, Amy also shared her nervousness resulting from unfamiliarity with the new environment, lack of knowledge in the subject, and difficulties in understanding the assigned reading materials caused by inadequate linguistic abilities:

I was in a panic, because I just got here and I had to present in the third week when I basically knew nothing. Besides, the presentation was supposed to be rather long. I was terrified. [...] I was nervous because of language and content. I couldn't understand the content due to the (English) language. [...] I knew the meaning of every word in that article, still I couldn't get the author's point. [...] The paper is hard to understand because of the too much abstract content. How can I possibly understand such abstraction when I had no idea even about the concrete stuff? - *Amy*

In comparison, Jade brought up her experiences of being overwhelmed by the first presentation in another course due to misunderstanding the professor's requirement as well as insufficient preparation:

I stayed at home, overwhelmed by reading articles full of images of the brain for that presentation. [...] It was my first presentation after all, so I believed that I should get it done really well, as perfect as possible. Not until we went to the professor that we learned the professor did not hold that stringent requirement for us. [...] I was extremely scared before [learning her not-so-strict requirement]. [...] I also felt nervous before the presentation, as we three had not had enough time for rehearsal. – *Jade*

Similarly, Beth harbored different feelings towards assignments in varied formats which were subject to professors' disparate standards. Her increased familiarity with the academic environment contributed to the decreased nervousness and better performance in the second year:

Back then, I was just enrolled in McGill and I had little self-confidence, so I was a bit intimidated when talking to the professor. I didn't talk much in fear of inappropriate diction or making mistakes. [...] [For another presentation,] I was a little nervous before presenting, but not too bad. It was not a very interactive presentation and I was only supposed to present for five to ten minutes. [...] I was nervous about both the content and the language, but I found that I would be less scared on the condition that I had prepared pretty well. [...] In addition, we don't have much experience in giving presentation, so Chinese students are at a disadvantage in comparison with other students. [...] Things turned better by the second year. I was less scared. Besides, I learned how local people (present), for example, I can make a joke or pose a question following other classmates' patterns. Then I was less panicked than before. The nervousness at the beginning of the study may be partially caused by unfamiliarity, not just by the language. – *Beth*

To add to the note on the requirement of assignments, Maria mentioned that the format of the assignment, namely, group or individual work, also influenced her level of nervousness:

I was pretty nervous about the first presentation, but I think I had always been that nervous until the second year. [...] It occurred to me that I was extra nervous about the individual presentation I gave at the other class. I was all by myself, so I had no idea if my presentation was good or bad. [...] When there were other people in the team saying okay with the group presentation, I felt confident because I was not the only one who thought so. [...] I was much more nervous about individual presentations than group presentations. – *Maria*

In stark contrast, Edison, the only participant confident in all discussed English usage, was generally at ease with almost all presentations, even including unprepared ones:

I feel that my presentations gradually went more and more (smoothly). At one class, I think I performed even better than the one I just told you about. At the end of that presentation, the professor invited me to share my own research with the whole class. I was very confident, perhaps because I was familiar with that subject. I didn't even need to plan much. -*Edison*

On the other hand, Jade, Gabrielle, and Amy found written assignments equally or even more anxiety-provoking than oral assignments:

I was really nervous about that (written) assignment. I was even nervous while writing. I was afraid that my writing wasn't good enough. Back then, you didn't know what your peers' levels were, or what the professor's standards were, so you would be worried that your work, which you wrote in the same way as you usually do, would turn out to be a total failure (in the public eye). - *Jade*

I also felt nervous before presentations for sure, but not after I went up to the stage. What I was nervous about must be the content of the presentation. I was afraid that I couldn't answer the spontaneous questions raised by the audience. My level of English has never occurred to me [as an issue]. [...] As a consequence of the negative feedback I received on my written assignments, I have become scared of writing. I don't dare to write. Then I spend a lot of time pondering sentence by sentence. – *Gabrielle*

I was extremely nervous writing the reading response every week, so as for the other assignments. I can never get five out five. The fact that the professor always deducted some points on my assignments made me anxious, including the final project. – *Amy*

In summary, participants' diverse emotional responses, including nervous, panicky, excited, and worried, generally matched their varied LSE indexes in the survey. It seems that participants with higher LSE experienced less nervousness or panic, and their focus was more about the subject matter rather than the language. The formats and requirements of the task participants faced with also played a role in arousing participants' mixed feelings. As time went by, participants grew more confident about such academic assignments by the second

year. What is also interesting to notice is that all participants mentioned the employment of the technique of drafting script in avoidance of unprepared speech or spontaneous conversations. This technique of drafting script and participants' opinions about spontaneous speech are going to be discussed in the following subsection.

#### **4.4 Engagement in Meaningful Communicative Practice**

##### **4.4.1 Speech spontaneity.**

The present subsection is going to discuss how the chance to prepare in advance of engaging in English speech influenced participants' LSE to some extent. Participants' lack of spontaneity of speech is reflected in drafting scripts for academic presentations for fear of impromptu questions and discussion. As showed in the following excerpts, most of the participants mentioned their memorization of scripts before the presentation to keep everything on track and under control. Participants detailed their preference of script as an aid to build up their confidence in giving presentations:

I feel more comfortable giving a presentation than joining a group discussion, because I can prepare in advance. [...] I couldn't help referring to my script for the first presentation. My second presentation was a bit better. I was able to present without reading the script - *Heather*

Most presentations went as I expected thanks to the script I drafted in advance. -*Amy*

I memorized my script, then I just ran up the stage and recited my script, then ran back down. I must make myself fully prepared before going up the stage to speak. [...] Since language is not something that one can improve all of a sudden, we can only work on the content so that we will feel more confident. - *Beth*

We do need to understand the assigned journal articles or papers first. Only then can we formulate the ideas. As for such presentations, I do prepare in advance and wrote down everything I want to say, then recite the script. - *Edison*

Beth, Jade, and Maria also indicated their dislike of the spontaneous speech for the possible loss of face:

I didn't dare to talk about the thoughts that popped up in my mind. If I suddenly came up with some ideas that were simple enough, I might talk about them. If they were a bit complex, I would not bring them up at all, despite my willingness to share. [...] How awkward would it be if I had to ask my audience about the meaning! - *Beth*

Many of my audience are native speakers. Chances are that they know much more about the topic that I'm presenting than myself. If someone asks a question, I'm not able to answer. Or I cannot even understand his or her question. Then I am doomed. - *Jade*

I think it is because English is our second language that we'd usually hope and try making the presentation not deviate from our pre-structured content too much. Therefore, we set up the subject matter, write the script, and recite the lines. There may be some changes on the scene, but I hope they don't jump out of the circle I designed. Because once I need to improvise, I will be very nervous, so I'd rather not improvise at all. - *Maria*

In addition to the script on paper, Maria also mentioned how she had to draft a script in mind while communicating with others, because she was unable to respond spontaneously:

I was touched by a statement [in the Statements], which was I actually cannot give other people answers spontaneously [in a dialogue]. I need to listen to the other person, then I deduce what he or she is talking about. Then I'd arrange my sentences in my mind before I speak. I think this is more like writing a composition in my mind, then recite it out loud. - *Maria*

In summary, most participants resorted to script drafting on paper or in mind to help them arrange their thoughts and language, so that they feel more confident to enunciate clearly. Even if some participants would like to discuss something impromptu, they still tended to avoid spontaneous speech for fear of losing face. All the above analysis was mainly in the classroom context. What participants' English usage outside the classroom was like and whether the aforementioned tendencies held true outside the classroom are going to be examined in the following subsection.

#### 4.4.2 English usage outside the classroom.

The obligation to complete academic assignments does not apply to extracurricular activities, so the decision of whether participants would participate in or run away from certain activities involving using English relied owed much to their confidence in English use. As the following excerpts showed, some participants' life outside the classroom is very "Chinese".

Amy and Maria pointed out their how their communication in English was mainly constrained to unavoidable instrumental conversations in their life outside school.

There is nowhere for me to write in English [outside the classroom]. [...] Sometimes I write diary entries, but in Chinese. Actually the frequency I use English outside the classroom is not very high. [...] Even when I go out, the only little contact I could have is with the staff [e.g. waiters]. – *Amy*

My extracurricular life is rather Chinese dominated. I can meet some foreigners in my school life or when I go shopping. Other than that, I am either at home or at Chinatown. [...] There has been little chance to use English. – *Maria*

In addition, some of them tended to bypass social gatherings where "awkward" and effortful conversations in English are likely to happen. For instance, Amy mentioned her avoidance of social events due to linguistic and cultural differences with foreign classmates:

I will avoid some events in consideration of the language. For example, I don't feel like going to foreign classmates' birthday parties. I don't know what I should talk about, so it will be pretty awkward for me to be there. – *Amy*

Unlike Amy, Beth would hang out with local friends, but her feeling of "obliged" and "constrained" about such social activities can be explained by her self-perceived deficiency in English as well:

I feel very tired about forcing myself to go out with local friends from time to time. Though I don't actually like hanging out with them that much, I still feel the necessity to do that. [...] It's just hanging out with them is not as much fun and comfortable as



that with my own compatriots. It's alright to socialize with them, but somehow I feel constrained. I have a hard time following their topics sometimes, at the same time, I don't want to appear to be too stupid. - *Beth*

In comparison, Jade expressed that she enjoyed taking part in deep thinking or group activities in English, such as contemplating TED talks<sup>2</sup>, debating over political standpoints:

With the reminder of the Statements, I remember that I actually have similar scenarios of debate over political or other serious topics about ideology with my foreign friends. Even when I think over the complex topics covered in some online videos I watched, such as Ted talk, it is a totally new experience for me to think in English. I found it really cool and fascinating. [...] I actually enjoyed debating with people. - *Jade*

Besides, hanging out with foreign friends took a key role in boosting participants' confidence and shaping participants' willingness to communicate. As the excerpts below showed, participants with higher LSE benefited from hanging out with foreign friends, while the more withdrawn participants who had few friends other than their compatriots indicated low LSE. Jade's, Beth's, and Edison's narratives provided a stark contrast with Gabrielle's and Amy's, which corresponded to their responses in the survey perfectly.

I used to hang out with foreign friends very often. The communication with them boosted my confidence to some extent. - *Jade*

I think I have a rather positive mindset. I might have spent more time on socializing [than other international Chinese students], so I felt just fine and happy when my cohorts complained about all sorts of things. Therefore, I am rather confident, even if I did not graduate from a famous university and my English is not very outstanding. - *Beth*

Since many of my friends are native speakers, I never regarded English usage as a big deal. We had lunch together and hung out together for a while. It was during that period of time when I felt my abilities in oral English improved the most rapidly. [...] Being aware that I can communicate with them and that they understood all I wanted to express made me feel really (confident). - *Edison*

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<sup>2</sup> TED talks are open-access online videos from expert speakers on education, business, science, technology, etc.. More information can be found on the following website: <https://www.ted.com/talks>

I have hardly made any [foreign] friends here in these two years. - *Gabrielle*

I don't think I have many foreign friends, only a few, so there is little chance to speak English. So the amount of meaningful conversation I have with others is very limited. [...] I've never communicated with the local people, nor have I worked with them. [...] Besides, all Chinese students are not very enthusiastically talkative. - *Amy*

In summary, different LSE inspired participants to make different decisions in approaching extracurricular activities, which lead to participants' varied lifestyle outside school. Being friends with people from other countries, with whom speaking English is mandatory, was of great help for participants' LSE and even the attitude towards life. Along with the discussion of participants' life experiences outside school, participants also brought up the identity and culture concept behind their perspectives in the language usage. In the following subsection I look into the two constructs more thoroughly.

#### **4.4.3 Identity and culture.**

Brought up several times in the interviews, the concepts of culture and identity pertinent to language usage and LSE are the focus of the current subsection. As can be observed in the following interview excerpts, these two elements coalesced into a complex whole which exerted considerable influence on participants' self-perception, (dis)engagement in language related activities, and the attitudes toward and the amount of effort spent on foreign language learning.

To start with, participants justified the fluctuation and underestimation of self-rated LSE reflected in the survey with the concerted influence of humility and neutrality — two core virtues of the Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) (Bang & Montgomery, 2013). CHC

may also have been internalized so much that participants have regarded them as personal characteristics, as embodied in Beth's, Maria's, and Gabrielle's responses in the interview:

It has something to do with personal characteristics. I am rather humble. - *Beth*

I tend not to give myself absolute opinions, so none of my choices was the first or the last [in the questionnaire]. Regardless, I'd only choose relative good even if I am rather confident about myself in that aspect. The same is true for aspects that I am not good at. Right, I tend to be neutral, no absolute options. - *Maria*

It is because of both humility and misunderstanding [of myself]. Besides, I don't think I am that good, because I still have trouble expressing myself from time to time. - *Gabrielle*

Similarly, Heather drew an analogy between Chinese and English to reveal how her language ideology and personal characteristics came into play in her rather conservative responses in the survey:

It is because of many [reasons]. For example, I still feel unconfident when giving a presentation. Moreover, I always hold the idea that a language can never be just language. It contains much more content, such as one's thinking patterns and personal characteristics. Take me as an example: I am also unconfident about my Chinese. Though my lack of confidence in English might not be totally the same as my lack of confidence in Chinese, [they are definitely related]. - *Heather*

Coupled with the profound impact of CHC, insufficient knowledge of the local culture and lack of communication skills also contributed to participants' withdrawal from interacting with the local people. Amy and Edison agreed that this is a common issue among most international Chinese students.

I think it is more a matter of culture than of language. As we don't know the local culture very well, we cannot carry on conversations. I don't think language [proficiency] is the biggest issue. It's just sometimes we don't know how to respond or take turns after someone said something. - *Amy*

A common issue that can be found amongst most international Chinese students is that they don't know how to chat. [...] For instance, one is supposed to provide certain responses when someone tells you something. It is this kind of vocabulary or

phrases that are missing. Chinese students probably have read too many books, which are very formal and without native oral expressions for chatting. I feel that many Chinese students talk scrupulously by books. They don't want to be that formal either, but they don't know a casual way to express themselves. [...] Being unfamiliar with the local culture sometimes influences my interaction with the local people as well, such as when my colleagues are talking about hockey, or the topic is local policies or regulations. With zero knowledge of the topic, I find it hard to join the conversation even if I can understand what they are saying. – *Edison*

In addition, Heather and Gabrielle remained adamant in their opposition to the English language as an incarnation of foreign culture, defending their own culture and identity. To be specific, Heather and her friend clung to their Chinese identities firmly by holding onto traditional Chinese cultural products and ways of entertainment in their spare time. Their refusal of the foreign culture was embodied in selection between Chinese/English songs, reading materials, etc.:

The friend, who is studying in the States, also found that things are not the same as she expected. [...] We talked about what we usually do after school. She told me that she recites ancient Chinese poems, practices calligraphy, etc. As you can see, when we are put into this [foreign] cultural background, we hold a rejecting attitude instead. I feel the same way. I used to listen to English songs all the time when I was back in China, but I have never listened to one single English song since I was here. All my previous bad habits of xenophilia have been eradicated. - *Heather*

In a like manner, Gabrielle mentioned her direct disinterest in understanding native speakers' conversations and her unwillingness to "try that hard" to integrate. Even though the following narrative she described happened when she was on an exchange program in South Korea, which is a different context from the current study abroad context in Canada, her story still symbolized the combined influence of reluctance about foreign cultures and low LSE:

My friends asked me out for brunch. I asked who would be there, and I was told the other attendees were nine white girls. Then I decided not to join them. My friends still don't know why I did not go for the brunch till today. They all thought that I might have something personal, but that's not the truth. I just thought I could not understand them at all. They usually talk about American politics and everything about their own

culture, which I don't understand and I don't want to understand. That's too boring for me. Besides, I need to try that hard. Therefore, I ended up not going at all. – *Gabrielle*

Looking back at the living abroad experiences in Canada, Gabrielle and Jade shared the opinion that international students should be seen as “international people” instead of “immigrants”. The identity they themselves forged were different from that local people gave them, which resulted in certain conflicts in mind between the two parties.

In my opinion, the people here are not very friendly. It's probably because they have so many immigrants that they no longer see us as foreigners. They don't intentionally slow down the speech speed when talking to us. They'd regard us the same as them, so they keep talking regardless whether we understand or not. - *Jade*

There are so many immigrants in North America that the local people have no concept of foreigners any more. Everyone is seen as immigrant who should have learned the local language. In the case of Quebec, people are supposed to learn French. Therefore, if one doesn't speak good French, he/she will be regarded as not working hard enough. However, I think they should know that we are currently international people, not immigrants. [...] I had wanted to speak like a native speaker before coming here, but after arrival, I found that [my mindset changed]. Firstly, it's a matter of identity. I am Taiwanese, obviously I speak with Taiwanese accent, so what? In addition, I think my current level (of English proficiency) is good enough as a foreigner. - *Gabrielle*

In a nutshell, participants' self-perceptions and involvement in foreign language usage outside the classroom are associated with their assumed stance on their own culture and identity, as well as the foreign culture and the given identity. As noted in participants' comments, such as Gabrielle's, they were satisfied with their current level of English. Whether such mindset regulated their investment in self-improvement in English and what efforts were made are going to be looked into in the subsequent subsections.

## 4.5 Investment in Improving LSE

### 4.5.1 Efforts devoted to advance English proficiency or LSE.

Since the previous subsections of this chapter presented results of quite a few participants' relatively low LSE in certain English usages, it seemed logical that participants should have made certain attempts or sought some assistance to make themselves more comfortable with those tasks with which they felt uneasy. Surprisingly, participants did not spend much effort on improving their English proficiency or LSE, as revealed in the current subsection. Besides, they seldom, if ever, turned to other sources for help. In most participants' opinion, the onus is on themselves. The sojourner mindset seemed to have affected participants' persistence in keeping up their effort to develop their linguistic skills and LSE, as well as their initiative to integrate into local society. The following interview excerpts consist of recall of participants' attempts made and assistance expected in improving their proficiency and linguistic self-efficacy beliefs.

For example, Beth's persistence in accumulating English vocabulary has been dying down over time. The motivator shifted from her conscience to interest, and the amount of effort spent on improving her English receded.

When I first got here, I would consciously accumulate my vocabulary by listening. I had always been building up my English vocabulary and expressions during daily conversations. Even though I am not doing that now, I still watch American TV series. [...] Nevertheless, I don't spend time purposefully learning English as I used to during test preparation. It would be great if one did that, but such effort is not a necessity. I think I should also do that, but I am a bit lazy. - *Beth*

In a similar vein, Edison agreed with Beth on sparing efforts on improving his English being "unnecessary", together with his lack of motivation as a result of the absence of standardized exams.

Unlike before when I'd note down unknown words, I have never done that (since I was here). I think that's unnecessary, and because I'm lazy. The absence of exams also takes away my motivation. [...] I think one ought to continue learning, granted they have time and energy. We should continue learning everything, regardless being abroad or at home. It must be good for oneself if he/she learns and memorizes more than the others. -*Edison*

Amy related her expectation of assistance and devotion of effort with her post-sojourn plan. Her mindset has changed significantly once she made up her mind to go back to China after graduation, which interrupted her intentions and attempts to integrate.

I used to expect assistance from others, especially when I first arrived here. Now I don't expect it any longer, because I've made up my mind to go back home after graduation. If I decided to immigrate or that I wanted to stay here and to develop my career, then definitely I would want assistance from others. [...] I used to think that I should spend effort making some changes (to my English) and trying to learn about the local culture, etc.. Now I just don't feel the necessity. - *Amy*

In comparison, Gabrielle regarded her English level as having reached a plateau. Due to such "language fossilization", she did not work much on improving her oral English, nor did she bother to ask for assistance, even though she expressed being slightly unconfident in interpersonal communication in English in the Questionnaire.

Recently I have been reading books to better my English reading skills. I've been reading a novel, which I found quite helpful. Never have I expected or turned to other people or organizations for help. I think I am good enough. Where else can I progress to? I think I am sort of in the middle of the so-called language fossilization. I've reached a certain point. Yeah, perhaps expanding my vocabulary is the utmost I can work on, but the style of my spoken English has been shaped already. - *Gabrielle*

Similarly, Heather did not turn to peers or professors for help either. Her understanding attitude and considerate style explained the zero expectation from others and the unwillingness to trouble others with her own issues:

Everyone has their own business to occupy themselves with. [...] I don't think I have expected anything from the professors after class. I am not hoping them to change anything or provide anything particularly because of me either. - *Heather*

Agreed with Heather, Edison also clarified why the responsibility for resolving the language issues should fall on students instead of professors:

I don't think the professors are responsible for revising (students' work). Or it can be put this way, they expected that our (English) language should be good enough to support our study here, since we managed to come here. - *Edison*

By contrast, Maria and Jade actively sought assistance from varied sources. The outcomes turned out to be quite distinct from each other. Maria responded positively to the help from formal university-level courses, private language schools, and extracurricular language exchange programs. Nevertheless, Jade recalled how her experience of being brushed off thwarted her further attempts to approach professors for help.

The French-Chinese meetup activity is more of a practice for my courage to speak French. [...] I found it quite helpful, because I had been really bad at plucking up the courage to speak French before I joined the club. [...] I studied all my French at a private language school. [...] When I miss something, I'd like to seek assistance provided there is such a chance, including the Graphos courses I took before. I heard they were about academic writing, then I thought academic writing was exactly what I wasn't good at. Then I rushed to sign up for the course. Therefore, I'd actively make use of available sources to help myself. [...] As soon as I feel that something is beyond my depth, I'd look for materials from somewhere to help me cope with that. - *Maria*

I did seek assistance from other people in my first year. I even tried turning to professors for help, but the feedback I received wasn't good. Then I stopped trying. [...] I forgot which professor I asked, but I did enunciate my difficulties in following the lectures as an international student. The feedback from the more than one professors, whom I consulted, was not that satisfactory overall. They might think that the issue was with me, so they wouldn't even bother to try coming up with some ideas. Or they proposed some very impractical solutions, which I can tell at the first sight that they were just brushing me off. I have never asked for help since then. - *Jade*

Though Jade didn't get the assistance she was looking for from professors, she tried other ways on her own to boost her linguistic self-efficacy beliefs.

I have made efforts to increase my self-efficacy beliefs. On one hand, as I told you earlier, I've been trying to care less. Even if sometimes people give me negative



feedback, I'd refrain from regarding that as disconfirmation of my proficiency. I have to realize that I am not a native speaker. It would be impractical if someone (native speaker) were to assume my English could be the same as theirs, which I can never achieve. Therefore, I'd tell myself that I have already got considerable achievement among my peers. On the other hand, I'd do more reading practice so that I would be more confident. - *Jade*

In summary, the results presented in this subsection illustrate a contrasting picture of participants' attitudes, experiences and viewpoints regarding the necessity, responsibility, and approaches to improve their English proficiency as well as LSE. The absence of language tests, the sojourner mindset, and the negative experiences of seeking assistance seemed to have discouraged participants from attempting to advance in English.

#### **4.5.2 Suggestions for the program and future students.**

The final subsection of the chapter consists of results of participants' opinions about what measures or support could benefit their linguistic self-efficacy beliefs. Pre-orientation, bridging courses, language/cultural exchange projects, and periodical personal evaluation were proposed by participants.

As the following excerpts showed, programs that can meet mutual interests are warmly welcomed, in which participants can be helpful while they are helped by the other party:

I think help must be mutual. It's impossible for one party to come and help the other at no condition, because there is time cost involved for them. Then I think it would be great if there is a program where some people are willing to come and learn Chinese from me, at the same time I can practice English with them. This seems more practical. - *Heather*

I think setting up a language partner program within the department of education could be a good idea. Native and non-native speakers could pair up to hang out or to have small chats. This could benefit our language learning to some extent. These are just my personal ideas. And it would be great if a Canadian could pair up with a newcomer to familiarize him/her with the local culture. - *Amy*

The ideal situation would be international students could make friends with native or local students. Or the school could create some events for them to work together and communicate. I think this will benefit international Chinese students' improvement in English to the utmost. [...] But such events don't seem to help local students in their English. - *Edison*

Pre-departure intervention was another suggested means to better prepare international students for the coming study abroad experiences.

Ideally speaking, there should be an intervention before students go abroad. The target of such intervention could be the language or cultural environment. After all, most of the students may not have been to any other foreign countries before they come to study abroad. Chances are they do not know much (about life abroad). If they don't watch American TV series, they would even have difficulties ordering coffee. Therefore, I think it would be great if there is such an intervention where the experienced schoolmates can share some tips or stories. - *Beth*

Similar to Beth's pre-departure intervention, Jade and Gabrielle brought up the idea of implementing a bridging program before the school formally started. Such programs ought to include courses on academic writing for ease in completing the coming comprehensive assignments.

I think the bridging program could be of help. For example, international students can take one or two courses to adjust themselves to general writing or academic writing. Regardless if such courses don't count as credits for graduation at all, we can at least know how we should approach writing or what the APA format is like, etc.. That's quite important. [...] It's not that we cannot write, it's just our previous way of writing at home is no longer applicable here. [...]. - *Jade*

I think we should have the bridging courses for academic writing. I am willing to sign up even if it charges. [...] My biggest issue is academic writing and the local academic culture. The local students start writing reference since middle school, but I didn't really follow that when I was first asked to write references. I wasn't so used to such writing culture. Then of course I didn't write well and my work was picked on, such as missing references or misuse of references. Things like MLA are all Western stuff. We've never learned that before, right? - *Gabrielle*

Maria approached the question from a different angle - she proposed that the school could keep some record to track students' progress. Such concrete and personalized reports would encourage international Chinese students even in the absence of standardized tests.

I think there should be periodical evaluation or something like that in the course, something personalized. I know it would be impossible for the professor to provide such evaluation to every student in the class for every assignment. But if some instrument was provided at the beginning and the end of the course respectively, the professor could confirm that my overall ability, or ability on certain subjects, did get better. [...] Such periodical encouragement or progress report could clearly show our efforts. [...] Then we'd have a more precise self-perception and know that we are indeed progressing in certain area, even if the progress is not very noticeable. – *Maria*

To summarize the current chapter: I presented results of surveys and interviews in this chapter. The comparison and contrast across participants' responses and within their own responses were presented. Results from this exploratory study suggest that participants have an overall tendency to downplay their linguistic self-efficacy beliefs when no specific prompts were given. Their linguistic self-efficacy beliefs were mainly influenced by their mastery experiences and social/verbal persuasion, which were two interrelated and overlapped sources in the current study. Specifically, participants' own performance in undertaking academic or casual tasks in English and interactions involving people's positive or negative responses mattered a lot. Though almost all participants clearly sensed uneasiness about certain English usages, they seemed to lack the motivation to take measures to improve their English proficiency or LSE. Such inadequacy of efforts and persistence devoted to bettering their language was related to the sojourner mindset and absence of standardized tests to some extent. Whether participants expected or sought assistance from other sources varied per individual difference. In avoidance of burdening other people with the responsibility to assist, the participants indicated a preference for language/cultural exchange

programs, pre-departure intervention, and progress report as approaches that could benefit their LSE.

In the subsequent chapter, the significance of these findings in relation to my research questions will be presented.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to explore international Chinese graduate students' linguistic self-efficacy beliefs (LSE) in their English usage in the context of studying at a Canadian English-language university. The related results were presented in the previous chapter with four emergent themes: self-perceptions of English usage, influential factors in the change of LSE, engagement in meaningful communicative practice, and investment in improving LSE. The present chapter continues to discuss and to interpret the findings in consideration of the three guiding research questions:

4. How do international Chinese graduate students perceive their current linguistic self-efficacy beliefs in English after studying abroad for over two semesters in an English-speaking environment?
5. Do their linguistic self-efficacy beliefs influence their academic and social performances? If so, how does the influence come into play?
6. What are the major sources of the change in international Chinese students' second language self-efficacy beliefs in the study abroad context?

First, the study aimed to understand international Chinese students' self-assessed LSE after studying at an English-medium university for over two semesters. Therefore, the first section of this chapter will unpack participants' LSE by discussing pertinent self-assessments, relating my own educational background to participants' responses and referring to Daniel Kahneman's theory of bias. Next, the second research question that informed this study was regarding the dynamics between participants' LSE and their academic and social performance. Thus, the second section will describe how these two components mutually

influenced each other. Participants' LSE and performance were also influenced by external environmental factors, which will be presented in the subsequent section. The third research question examined the major sources of the change in participants' LSE. What these sources were and how these sources were in agreement, yet not identical with, Bandura's self-efficacy theory, will be discussed in the third section of the chapter. We will also examine how culture and identity played a part in LSE. I will summarize the key findings which will then be related to the literature in each section.

### **5.1 Participants' Self-Perceived LSE in English**

The central research question that guided the current study investigated participants' self-perceptions of their LSE in varied English usages, including interpersonal communication, presentational speaking, presentational writing, interpretive listening, and interpretive reading. As reported in the previous chapter, participants held different levels of confidence in these five areas of English usage. Essential to this discussion are participants' responses to the surveys and the semi-structured interviews, where similarities and variation across participants' responses were observed, as well as consistency and conflicts within participants' own answers.

Participants' answers were similar to some extent. They all reported that some progress had been made in certain English skills, and they all underrated their LSE in at least one aspect of English usage. Having studied abroad for over two semesters, participants were relatively positive that the English-speaking environment contributed to their improvement in English, regardless whether the improvement was significant or not. When given instruments of three levels of specificity, all participants fine-tuned their self-assessment to a higher level

in the more specific instrument. Such refinement of their initial choice in participants' LSE could partially be explained by Daniel Kahneman's (2013) theory of biases in people's judgment and decision making. To be specific, Kahneman (2013) proposed that the two-system approach determines our judgment and choice — "System 1" engages "the automatic operations" and "System 2" involves the effortful "controlled operations." People tend to form intuitions and jump to conclusions with the "unconscious processes" of System 1 to minimize effort and optimize performance (p.28). This theory lent plausibility to my findings and partially gave a theoretical explanation for the patterns I observed in participants' revisions of their intuitive self-assessed LSE after pondering the detailed scenarios. In other words, participants' self-assessment was not very accurate, because they were thinking intuitively with "System 1" when asked to evaluate their overall linguistic self-efficacy in English. Later, participants were forced to think more carefully and thoroughly with "System 2" when the more detailed instrument for self-assessment was provided.

Additionally, participants' LSE differed from one area of English usage to another and participants' LSE varied considerably from each other. Notably, most participants were least confident in Presentational Speaking while most confident in Interpretive Reading. This tendency can be explained with the disparate Oriental and Western education schemes (Salili et al., 2001). Prior to being enrolled in the graduate program, most participants had received the traditional teacher-centered and exam-oriented Chinese education for years. As Beth remarked in the interview (see page 74), Chinese students had very little experience in delivering presentations or work collaboratively with other students back in China. Having received all my schooling prior to my current post-graduate education in China, I can totally

relate to the participants' point of view. My memories of drilling vocabulary, reading, listening, writing, and grammar are still fresh like yesterday. Unsurprisingly, participants expressed the highest level of confidence in reading, which they have been familiar with and well trained for, and the lowest confidence in speaking, which is relatively neglected in English education in China.

Besides, there is inevitably a certain discrepancy between international Chinese students' English, which was learned as a foreign language from textbooks, and the authentic English used by native speakers. For example, as some participants commented, international Chinese students generally have inadequate knowledge of informal expressions in English and it is never possible for the participants to use English as well as native speakers. When the discrepancy was put under the spotlight, it is understandable that these participants would feel uneasy and unconfident, especially when their output products (e.g. public presentations or written work) were exhibited. In comparison, the less interactive activities of listening or reading are less scrutinized, and can be aided with various tools and compensation skills. Besides, reading is mostly a personal task where students are free to develop their own understandings of the reading materials within a relatively loose time limit. Therefore, the majority of participants are most confident about Interpretive Reading and least confident about Presentational Speaking. At the same time, a complex of internal personal factors and external contextual factors are involved to shed light on how participants' self-assigned benchmarks on certain aspects can vary from Intermediate Mid to Superior (Bandura, 1997). A more detailed discussion of the sources of the change in participants' LSE will be provided in the third subsection of this chapter.



In summary, the overall findings of the multiple instruments of the current study show that most participants' LSE in different English usages varied, with the highest LSE in Interpretive Reading and the lowest LSE in Presentational Speaking. Also, participants' self-assessed LSE differed from each other on the same aspects of English usage, which makes LSE one construct among others in the area of individual differences. This construct, however, is not always accurately evaluated by international Chinese students, as demonstrated in the fluctuation of participants' responses. Nevertheless, participants would be better off minimizing the biases in their self-appraisals, considering the directive influence of self-efficacy on people's choice of activities and settings, as well as efforts and persistence in activities (Bandura, 1977). The subsequent section is going to provide an account of how such influence came into play in participants' social and academic performances.

## **5.2 Influence of LSE on Participants' Social and Academic Performances**

The current study substantiated the significant influence of LSE on international Chinese students' social and academic performances, as well as their commitment to improving English proficiencies and LSE in the open-ended interviews. As the results showed in the previous chapter, the higher LSE the participant held, the better his/her self-evaluated performance in using English for various purposes was, the more actively he/she engaged in informal English usage outside the classroom, and the greater his/her investment in improving English LSE and proficiencies. These results can be explained by the positive relationship between personal agency and self-efficacy. Namely, self-efficacy continuously

influences people's decision-making about the courses of action to pursue and the amount, duration and intensity of effort to invest (Bandura, 1984).

First, the present study showed that lack of LSE lead some participants to downplay, or even to be blind to, their accomplishment and progress, while sufficient LSE encouraged participants to acknowledge their achievements. In the interviews with participants, some of them with low LSE adopted very strong and negative words to describe their performance in certain English usages, such as public presentations or written assignments. Following such descriptions, I inquired how the audience reacted and what the professor thought of the same tasks. Surprisingly, the feedback participants received was not in proportion with their unfavorable self-assessment. By contrast, participants with high LSE were better at noticing and accounting for their self-perceived progress, confidence, and performance with sound reason. Besides, being self-assured enabled participants to live a relatively "easy life", less susceptible to other people's judgments.

Second, LSE determined international Chinese students' participation in meaningful communicative practice outside the classroom, which is essential to integrate into the local community. In line with Hessel's (2017) findings that L2 learners' self-efficacy was crucial in their task engagement and linguistic affordances in the study abroad context, this study also found that LSE partially determined the way that participants took up spontaneous linguistic practices, such as exchange of academic dialogue in class and casual conversations outside the class. Specifically, inadequate LSE provoked most participants' dislike of unprepared speech in public speaking, or even more vexing consequences, such as withdrawal from communal activities. These negative effects are detrimental to sojourners'

lives in and of themselves. As a result, participants adopted coping strategies like drafting scripts before giving presentations, which was not really helpful for their L2 learning. In contrast, sufficient LSE encouraged participants to interact with people outside their own social circles, which benefited them not only in that they made more friends, but also in boosting their confidence in using English in authentic contexts. Moreover, participants with high LSE took part in more in-depth discussion of assorted topics in English, which provided them with a valuable chance to learn about different thinking dispositions and cultures.

Finally, this study also demonstrated participants' diverse perspectives regarding the necessity of devoting efforts to improve their English proficiencies and LSE. Remarkably, these perspectives did not have a close relationship to participants' LSE or their real devotion to advancing their English levels. Though every participant agreed that allocating effort to learning English in the English-speaking environment is necessary for most, if not all, students, very few of them actually did make enough attempts. The few attempts that were made usually did not last long. This happened to every one of the participants, in spite of their levels of LSE. In our search for the reasons behind this phenomenon, "having become lazy" is the most common reason participants brought up to justify their insufficient effort. To further analyze the so-called "laziness", we found that in the absence of English language exams and well-structured language courses, participants became demotivated and lost in trying to figure out how they can progress in English. Therefore, it might be a good idea to have some program in place to guide and help non-native English speakers' language learning process, even though these students seem to be able to get by in daily school life.

In summary, LSE played a key role in determining participants' preparation, participation and self-perception of academic and social activities, but LSE was not directly related to participants' commitment to making progress in English.

### **5.3 Major Sources of the Change in Participants' LSE**

The major sources of the change in participants' LSE found in this study were mastery experiences, social/verbal persuasion and emotional states, partially in agreement with Bandura's (1997) proposed sources of efficacy beliefs (i.e. mastery experiences, social/verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, and physiological states). I was also struck by how participants' culture and identity infiltrated their language beliefs and practices. This subsection will discuss the manifestation of each source in participants' daily life.

First, the most significant factor influencing people's self-efficacy suggested by Bandura (1997) – mastery experiences – proved to be the leading component in this study as well. Within the context of study abroad, mastery experiences had a rich content, including smooth or broken communication with others, working experiences using English, but not scores in language proficiency tests. As can be observed from participants' responses in the interview, authentic English usage proved to be valuable for building international Chinese students' LSE. In contrast, experiencing broken and effortful conversations lessened participants' LSE. Taking this dynamic relationship between authentic interaction and LSE together with the interplay of LSE and participants' engagement in English practices outside the classroom, which is introduced in the previous subsection, I suppose some international Chinese students may fall into this vicious circle: low LSE holds participants back from communicating with others in meaningful ways, then the lack of authentic interaction in turn

harms participants' LSE. This unhelpful situation would hold until participants realize what is going on and break the deadlock purposefully.

Besides mastery experiences, social/verbal persuasion and emotional states also altered participants' LSE. In this study, social/verbal persuasion was comprised mainly of feedback from professors, peers, and other interlocutors; emotional states referred to the emotions participants felt while completing the task. These two intricately related factors often came together. Specifically, when participants received social/verbal persuasion, there was definitely a certain emotional response, be it mild or strong, positive, negative or neutral. This can be observed in the results displayed in the previous chapter, such as that classmates' encouragement could stimulate participants' confidence to confront the seemingly daunting task with a higher LSE. Since the mitigating effect of verbal/social persuasion seemed familiar to all as common sense, it would be ideal if everyone could contribute as much as they can to create a space of empathy and encouragement. Nevertheless, negative feedback and emotions are definitely still going to exist. Therefore, participants ought to learn to process the negative information appropriately, so that they can make the most out of the lesson instead of being hurt by the disapproving yet candid and good-intentioned feedback.

Finally, the most important findings of this study, which extended theoretical considerations of self-efficacy, are related to the exploration of the ubiquitous effect of culture and identity. We are to our own culture and identity as a fish is to water: these two elements surround us and exert influence on every aspect of our life, but tend to be overlooked by us, just because they are everywhere. Not until given a chance to talk about their self-efficacy in this study, participants seldom, if ever, reflected on how their deep-

rooted Chinese or Taiwanese identities shaped their way of thinking. For example, the two most-emphasized core virtues in Confucian Heritage Culture—humility and neutrality—affected participants' responses in the self-evaluation considerably. In addition, as the cross-cultural psychologist Gelfand (2018) argued, China, as one of the most typical “tight countries”, has many restrictions on what people can say in public and many rules; by contrast, people enjoy more freedom of speech in “loose countries” like Canada. Having been cautious about making their speech conform to the social norms all the time, international Chinese students must have brought the prudence to the study abroad context. Therefore, it is understandable that most participants were not very comfortable with English Presentational Speaking in the study abroad context, as the clear social norm of public speech was missing. For this reason, international Chinese students should beware of the possible influence of culture and identity on our self-concept. Researchers should also take culture and identity into consideration when examining self-perceived self-efficacy.

The contributions, limitations of the current study, and suggestions for future research will be presented at greater length in the concluding chapter.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

The current study employed a qualitative research design to examine whether international Chinese graduate students' claims that their English proficiency level had stagnated, if not deteriorated, since they came abroad to pursue post-graduate education, holds true under the microscope of academic research, as well as when, how, why, and under which situations the participants felt their linguistic self-efficacy beliefs (LSE) were changed by what. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, participants perceived minor to significant progress in their overall abilities in English. Zooming in on the four basic language skills — listening, speaking, reading, and writing—participants held diverging views about which skill benefitted the most from the study abroad experience. A similar divergence was also found in participants' self-confidence and self-evaluation of performance in different English usages. Those participants with stronger LSE entertained more positive self-perceptions than those whose LSE beliefs were weak. Thanks to such positive self-perceptions, the participants with stronger LSE also engaged in more meaningful communication in English, which in turn contributed to their LSE as mastery experiences. In addition to mastery experiences, other significant sources of LSE included social/verbal persuasion and emotional states. Moreover, the conflicts between Confucian heritage culture and Western culture, as well as strong ethnic identity, exerted considerable influence over international students' language practice and LSE as well. These findings were obtained by using surveys and semi-structured interviews as instruments and coding and thematic analysis as data analysis methods. This research has generated significant results to remedy the serious academic neglect of learner beliefs and cultural adaptation in language learning. Besides, it

has contributed to the existing body of literature on second language learning and self-efficacy beliefs in the context of study abroad. However, there remain certain limitations of the study, which also point to the need for and the direction for future cross-cultural research. Therefore, this final chapter will discuss the limitations of the study, suggest the contributions of the study, and recommend some future orientations.

## **6.1 Limitations**

Despite the interesting and important results found in respect of participants' self-perception about LSE in English, certain limitations of the current study need to be taken into consideration for interpreting the results more accurately. First, due to the employment of purposeful sampling techniques and time restrictions related to the researcher's graduate program, the population of participants is rather small. Besides, the recruited candidates are all from the same program with a similar educational background. Even though the nature of the program and the background may have contributed to participants' relatively higher language awareness compared to other international Chinese students, the transferability of the study is somewhat restricted because of the homogeneity of the group. This sample can by no means represent all international Chinese graduate students studying in English-medium universities. In addition, the gender imbalance in participants (six female and one male) limited further exploration of the potential relationship between gender and LSE.

Additionally, the long list of Can-Do statements did not make it very easy for participants to relate to the statements. If the statements had been more concise and concrete, to the level that users could have found everyday referents in the statements, they might have given more contemplative retrospection in the semi-structured interviews.



Finally, the subjectivity of the researcher as the key instrument to gather and interpret data is a widely held limitation in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2014). Being an international Chinese graduate student myself may have potentially shaped the interpretations I made during the study. For example, I might have leaned toward the theme of social/verbal persuasion over the theme of vicarious experiences when I analyzed the sources of LSE. Such unavoidable researcher's bias indeed existed, as my shared cultural and educational background with the participants advanced my understanding of the data collected.

## **6.2 Contributions**

Some limitations notwithstanding, the present study contributes to the existing literature in regards to international Chinese students' learner beliefs, especially self-efficacy beliefs in English, in the Study Abroad context. Though significantly influential on academic achievement as corroborated by large-scale reviews (e.g. Schunk & Pajares, 2002), perceived self-efficacy has not yet received adequate attention in the field of language learning. This study complements the existing body of research by providing deep insight into the dynamics between seven international Chinese students' LSE and self-perceptions of English usages, performances in social/academic activities, and investment in improving English proficiency or LSE.. The employment of surveys and interviews offered learners a chance to be agents voicing their self-perceptions rather than to be the passive objects of measuring instruments.

In addition, this study also sheds light on cultural aspects of English language usage of a specific cultural group –Confucian Heritage Culture learners. Specifically, participants from the “tight culture” were not used to the much fewer social norms in the “loose culture” (Gelfand, 2018), and their inadequate knowledge about the local culture artifacts made it hard

for them to interact with the local people. That partially resulted in participants' preference for socializing only with members of their in-group. This preference proved to be an indispensable element in international Chinese students' life pursuing higher education in a foreign country, while at the same time hindering participants from making progress in their oral linguistic proficiency. Considering participants' proposed measures to help improve their LSE and integrate into the local community, I think it is necessary for the hosting institution to have bridging programs and language/cultural exchange clubs to assist international Chinese students to be "culturally intelligent" and mentally ready for the distinctive Western academic life (Ang, Van Dyne, & Rockstuhl, 2015). The findings of the research and my personal experiences lead me to set out the following list of suggestions for universities, professors, and students.

The hosting universities could:

- Provide bridge programs for incoming international Chinese students. The courses or workshops in the program should include English courses (e.g. academic writing and presentation, critical thinking in reading literature), major-specific academic courses (e.g. fundamentals of SLA), and acculturation seminars (e.g. introduction to Quebec education system). The aim is to equip international Chinese students with necessary academic knowledge and skills, confidence in and positive attitudes towards integrating into the new community;
- Facilitate open discussions with professors and international Chinese students' representatives, where both parties can bring issues to the table;

- Assign a departmental advisor to address students' concerns, track their progress, and organize events that can contribute to the collaboration between the local community and the body of international students.

The professors could:

- Consider students' diverse background while constructing grading grids, taking into account both the content and the language use in students' work;
- Elaborate their feedback with more reasons and exemplars so that students are convinced and able to improve the next time;
- Be alert about signs of potential issues that are reflected on students' attendance, class participation, assignments, etc.;
- Encourage students to regularly reflect on their own beliefs, weaknesses, and progress.

The individual students could:

- Familiarize themselves well with academic English and Western academic rules before commencing their study abroad;
- Keep an open mind and try accustoming to the local culture;
- Make an effort to improve their English proficiency consistently;
- Be aware of their own beliefs and biases in self-evaluation;
- Ask for clarification instead of making assumptions about professors' feedback or implication of peers' conversation, in order to avoid miscommunication;
- Be up-front about their difficulties and seek timely assistance.

### 6.3 Future Research

This exploratory qualitative study has generated a few important findings about international Chinese students' linguistic self-efficacy beliefs in English. Nevertheless, the dearth of research in this area points to the need to carry out both qualitative and quantitative cross-cultural research. For example, future researchers could address the perspectives of international students from other cultural backgrounds which were left unexamined in the current study. It also may be interesting to see how L2 speakers' responses varied according to gender or personalities, if the researcher could recruit a large population of participants. If appropriate quantitative instruments could be established to validate the correlation between certain factors and LSE, researchers could design qualitative studies with more specific foci based on the results of quantitative study.

In addition, international students registered in different programs may hold varied opinions according to the diverse requirements of the discipline. Programs in Social Science and Humanities tend to have a higher requirement for language compared to the natural sciences. Whether the different levels of rigor of the disciplines make a difference in students' LSE is also worth consideration. Future researchers might want to consider if there are any commonalities brought up by L2 international students registered in different programs. If so, the university might need to take certain universal measures to meet L2 international students' needs. If not, it is recommended to have assistance specific to each department in place. Hopefully, this study, together with future research will facilitate a more favorable space for international students' studying abroad.

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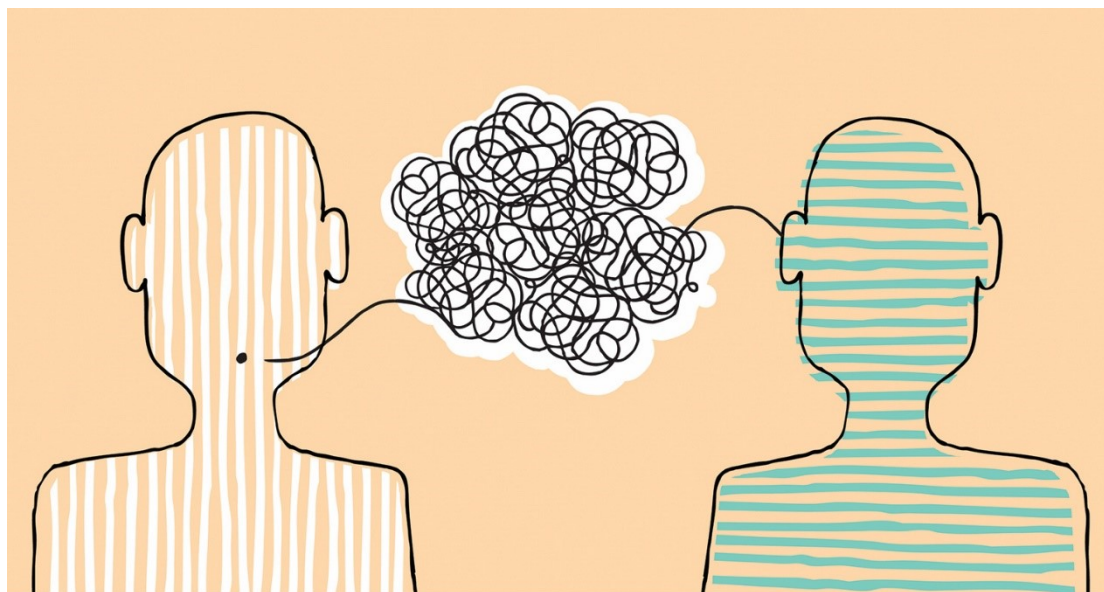
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## Appendix A. Bilingual Flyer



留学这么久了，你对自己的英语水平还满意吗？你觉得自己在进步吗？现在是否能无障碍与外国友人交流呢？可以和人侃侃而谈专业知识吗？够发鸡汤表达文艺情怀吗？本实验课题研究中国留学生英语语言效能和语言精通水平，回顾自己的初衷，发掘留学带来的改变，一起探索“我觉得”对“事实上”的影响。（提供免费咖啡和小食。）欢迎给我（[litong.liu@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:litong.liu@mail.mcgill.ca)）或我的导师（[mela.sarkar@mcgill.ca](mailto:mela.sarkar@mcgill.ca)）发邮件以了解更多信息。

Are you satisfied with your current English level now that you have been studying abroad for a while? Do you think you have been progressing? Can you communicate with foreign friends without any barriers? Can you elaborate on your academic field to others? Can you fully express your literary attainment in English? The present research topic focuses on Chinese international students' self-efficacy and proficiency of English language, reviewing your initial expectations and goals, discovering the changes brought by studying abroad, and exploring the influence of "I think" on "in fact". (Free coffee and snacks are provided.) For more information, please email me ([litong.liu@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:litong.liu@mail.mcgill.ca)) or my supervisor Prof. M. Sarkar ([mela.sarkar@mcgill.ca](mailto:mela.sarkar@mcgill.ca)).

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

## Appendix B. Introductory Script

Title: An Exploration of International Chinese Students' Self-Efficacy Beliefs about their English Language Performance in a Studying Abroad Context

Principal Investigator: Liting Liu

Script: Self-efficacy, or students' beliefs about their ability to perform a task successfully, is an important part of learning a foreign language. The purpose of this research study is to explore what international Chinese students' self-efficacy beliefs are, and what the influential factors in shaping such beliefs. Questionnaire and interview will be the main instruments for data collection. If you are willing to participate, you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire about your personal background (e.g., age, years of education, previous educational experience) as well as your English background at the beginning, which will take approximately five minutes to complete.

If you are willing to proceed after the questionnaire, you are more than welcome to check the "I agree to be further contacted" box and to leave your contact information on the survey sheet. Then we will schedule an appropriate time for the following interview session. Our meeting is estimated to last about one to two hours. You can choose the place for our meeting, either on campus or at a quiet café. Free coffee and snacks will be provided. All the information you provide will be confidential and used for research purposes only. You are free to use your real name if you do not mind your identity being open to the public. As an alternative, you can also use the pseudonym that I provide to remain unidentifiable to everyone else other than me.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project. Nor are there any direct benefits to you, except that you can gain deep insights into your self-efficacy beliefs as a language user and learner. However, your data may inspire relevant parties, such as program coordinators, school administrators, to take action to better accommodate our cohort - international Chinese students. The data collected will remain anonymous and confidential, and your responses will be kept under lock and key. Your answers will be coded with a number, so your specific responses will not be linked to you.

Your participation is totally voluntary, and you may withdraw from this project at any time without penalty.

This study is being conducted by Liting Liu, who can be reached at [liting.liu@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:liting.liu@mail.mcgill.ca) if you have any further questions.

## Appendix C. Consent Form

Researcher: Liting Liu

M.A. student in Department of Integrated Studies in Education, McGill University

Email: [liting.liu@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:liting.liu@mail.mcgill.ca)

Phone number: 438-228-1947

Supervisor: Prof. M. Sarkar

Department of Integrated Studies in Education, McGill University

Email: [mela.sarkar@mcgill.ca](mailto:mela.sarkar@mcgill.ca)

Phone number: (514) 398-4527 Ext. 094468

Title of Project: An Exploration of International Chinese Students' Self-Efficacy Beliefs about their English Language Performance in a Studying Abroad Context

Purpose of the Study: The current study aims to delve into sources and effects of international Chinese graduate students' linguistic self-efficacy beliefs. In other words, the present study looks into how participants perceive their linguistic ability in a studying abroad context and what factors influence such perceptions.

Study Procedures: There are three instruments used in the current study: A survey, an interview, and your previous assignments and slides. We will start with the ACTFL Can-Do statements, which is composed of everyday scenarios. For this survey, you only need to reflect on if you can or cannot perform certain tasks in the four given categories, namely interpersonal communication, presentational speaking, presentational writing, interpretive listening, and interpretive reading.

After filling out the survey, we will have a one-on-one interview regarding your responses in the questionnaire and memories triggered by your work for those previous courses. Therefore, if you are willing to participate, you are welcome to send me several pieces of your previous assignments or slides before our appointment so that I can print them out. It is alright if you don't like to share your work with me, and you can keep them to yourself. In this case, you will need to bring your personal laptop in order to retrieve the document. The only purpose for me to gather your work is to remind you of your experiences in the previous semesters. I will not keep your work in any form after the interview session.

The whole data collection process takes about one to two hours. The interview is going to be audio-recorded and you have the right to request the recording to be deleted anytime you want. I will also send you the transcription together with my field notes for verification.

Voluntary Participation: Participation is totally voluntary. You may refuse to participate in parts of side and linguistic progress. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you have

every right to withdraw at any time, for any reason. Whether you choose to participate or not will not result in any loss of benefit. For the purpose of data analysis, you are encouraged to use the same name or pseudonym throughout the study. The data will be stored in my personal laptop secured with a password known only to myself.

**Potential Risks:** There are no anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

**Potential Benefits:** You have the chance to explore your own linguistic self-efficacy beliefs. Your feedback may contribute to educational institutes' improvement in addressing international Chinese students' needs.

**Compensation:** There is no monetary reward for participating in the study, but free coffee and snacks are provided by the researcher.

**Confidentiality:** I will collect your language learning background information (e.g. how long you have been learning English, your IELTS band), your responses in a self-assessment questionnaire about your linguistic abilities, and our conversation in the one-on-one interview regarding your perceptions of your self-perceived progress in linguistic performance. You are encouraged to bring your previous assignments or slides for presentation with you as a reference. However, those works of yours will not be kept in record in any form.

To protect your confidentiality, I will provide random pseudonyms different from your real English names. You are invited to choose one sharing the same initial letter as your first name. For example, my first name is Liting, then I am going to choose my pseudonym from Lucy, Lena, Lynn, etc., while my real English name known to all is Veronica. Just in case that participants may share the same letter of their first names, I will note down your choices in a txt file saved under the password-protected folder. All the data will be stored in my encrypted personal laptop.

In addition, the data will be saved in a password-protected folder. My personal USB flash drive is used as a backup device storing all the data in an encrypted folder. No other electronic device, such as iPad, will be used for documentation. With your consent, the identifiable and unidentifiable data, including every document saved under the password-protected folder in my laptop, will be kept for another seven years for future publication. The data will not be permanently deleted until you request so. The study is expected to finish by August 2018. If you are not comfortable with your data to be used for publication after the study is completed, I will delete corresponding data at any time as you request. If you withdraw from the study at any point, your data will be destroyed permanently.

Yes: ☐ No: ☐ You consent to be identified by real name in reports.

Yes: ☐ No: ☐ You consent to be identified by pseudonym in reports.

Yes: ☐ No: ☐ You consent to have your organization's name used.

Yes: ☐ No: ☐ You consent to be audio-taped.

Yes: ☐ No: ☐ You consent that your data can be used for future publication.

Yes:\_\_\_ No:\_\_\_ You consent that your data will be kept in record for seven years after the research is completed.

Questions: Please contact me ([liting.liu@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:liting.liu@mail.mcgill.ca)) if you have any questions about the project.

If you have any ethical concerns or complaints about your participation in this study, and want to speak with someone not on the research team, please contact the McGill Ethics Manager at 514-398-6831 or [lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca](mailto:lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca) .

## Appendix D. The Language Contact Profile - Entry Questionnaire

This questionnaire aims to present your present Chinese language profile. It will take up to 10 minutes to answer the questions. Your answers are totally confidential and the data will not be used for anything else but the present research, which is an exploration of international Chinese students' linguistic self-efficacy beliefs about their English. Some questions are designed for demonstrating your English learning background and performance. Some questions posed in the end are a rough assessment of self-efficacy beliefs as a commencement of the current research. Please be honest when you fill out the questionnaire. Thank you very much for your participation!

1. Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Country of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

4. What is your native language?

1) Chinese 2) English 3) Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. What language(s) do you speak at home?

1) Chinese 2) English 3) Other \_\_\_\_\_

6. In what language(s) did you receive the majority of your education before graduate school?

1) Chinese 2) English 3) Other \_\_\_\_\_

7. Have you ever been to an English-speaking region *for the purpose of studying English* for over six months? If so, please specify the designated country and length of your stay.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ / No

8. Other than the experience mentioned in Question 7, have you ever lived in a situation where you were exposed to a language other than your native language (e.g., by living in a multilingual community; visiting a community for purposes of study abroad or work; exposure through family members, etc.)? If so, please specify the designated country and length of your stay.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ / No

9. How many years (if any) have you *studied* this language in a *formal school* setting?

Language	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Number of years of study
English					

10. Did you take TOEFL or IELTS before applying for McGill?

Yes.

No.

11. Please provide your overall IELTS band or TOEFL score.

\_\_\_\_\_

12. In the options below, rate your general English proficiency upon arrival. Use the following ratings:

1) Poor 2) Fair 3) Good 4) Very good 5) Native/Nativelike

13. In the options below, rate your current overall English proficiency. Use the following ratings:

1) Poor 2) Fair 3) Good 4) Very good 5) Native/Nativelike

14. How confident are you using English to converse with others in a person-to-person situation? Use the following ratings:

1) Very unconfident 2) Slightly unconfident  
3) Slightly confident 4) Very confident

15. How confident are you using English to give a presentation? Use the following ratings:

1) Very unconfident 2) Slightly unconfident  
3) Slightly confident 4) Very confident

16. How confident are you using English to write about your ideas for both general interest and academic purposes? Use the following ratings:

1) Very unconfident 2) Slightly unconfident  
3) Slightly confident 4) Very confident

17. How confident are you following English used in daily life and lectures? Use the following ratings:

1) Very unconfident 2) Slightly unconfident  
3) Slightly confident 4) Very confident

18. How confident are you understanding English reading materials? Use the following ratings:

1) Very unconfident 2) Slightly unconfident  
3) Slightly confident 4) Very confident

19. Do you think there is a need to consciously make an effort to learn English even if you are in a total English-speaking environment?

1) Not necessary at all 2) Necessary for only some weak students  
3) Necessary for most students 4) Necessary for everyone

20. Do you think you have spent certain amount of time and effort improving your English since you have been here?

Yes.

No

Not sure

21. Do you foresee any changes in your English proficiency for the rest of your stay? (Circle the most possible choice.)

a) It may deteriorate   b) It may not change much   c) It may be better

I'd like to participate in the research and I agree to be further contacted.

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!



## Appendix E. NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements

## NCSSFL-ACTFL Global Can-Do Benchmarks

	Novice Low	Novice Mid	Novice High	Intermediate Low	Intermediate Mid
<b>Interpersonal Communication</b>	I can communicate on some very familiar topics using single words and phrases that I have practiced and memorized.	I can communicate on very familiar topics using a variety of words and phrases that I have practiced and memorized.	I can communicate and exchange information about familiar topics using phrases and simple sentences, sometimes supported by memorized language. I can usually handle short social interactions in everyday situations by asking and answering simple questions.	I can participate in conversations on a number of familiar topics using simple sentences. I can handle short social interactions in everyday situations by asking and answering simple questions.	I can participate in conversations on familiar topics using sentences and series of sentences. I can handle short social interactions in everyday situations by asking and answering a variety of questions. I can usually say what I want to say about myself and my everyday life.
<b>Presentational Speaking</b>	I can present information about myself and some other very familiar topics using single words or memorized phrases.	I can present information about myself and some other very familiar topics using a variety of words, phrases, and memorized expressions.	I can present basic information on familiar topics using language I have practiced using phrases and simple sentences.	I can present information on most familiar topics using a series of simple sentences.	I can make presentations on a wide variety of familiar topics using connected sentences.
<b>Presentational Writing</b>	I can copy some familiar words, characters, or phrases.	I can write lists and memorized phrases on familiar topics.	I can write short messages and notes on familiar topics related to everyday life.	I can write briefly about most familiar topics and present information using a series of simple sentences.	I can write on a wide variety of familiar topics using connected sentences.
<b>Interpretive Listening</b>	I can recognize a few memorized words and phrases when I hear them spoken.	I can recognize some familiar words and phrases when I hear them spoken.	I can often understand words, phrases, and simple sentences related to everyday life. I can recognize pieces of information and sometimes understand the main topic of what is being said.	I can understand the main idea in short, simple messages and presentations on familiar topics. I can understand the main idea of simple conversations that I overhear.	I can understand the main idea in messages and presentations on a variety of topics related to everyday life and personal interests and studies. I can understand the main idea in conversations that I overhear.
<b>Interpretive Reading</b>	I can recognize a few letters or characters. I can identify a few memorized words and phrases when I read.	I can recognize some letters or characters. I can understand some learned or memorized words and phrases when I read.	I can understand familiar words, phrases, and sentences within short and simple texts related to everyday life. I can sometimes understand the main idea of what I have read.	I can understand the main idea of short and simple texts when the topic is familiar.	I can understand the main idea of texts related to everyday life and personal interests or studies.

Intermediate High	Advanced Low	Advanced Mid	Advanced High	Superior	Distinguished
I can participate with ease and confidence in conversations on familiar topics. I can usually talk about events and experiences in various time frames. I can usually describe people, places, and things. I can handle social interactions in everyday situations, sometimes even when there is an unexpected complication.	I can participate in conversations about familiar topics that go beyond my everyday life. I can talk in an organized way and with some detail about events and experiences in various time frames. I can describe people, places, and things in an organized way and with some detail. I can handle a familiar situation with an unexpected complication.	I can express myself fully not only on familiar topics but also on some concrete social, academic, and professional topics. I can talk in detail and in an organized way about events and experiences in various time frames. I can confidently handle routine situations with an unexpected complication. I can share my point of view in discussions on some complex issues.	I can express myself freely and spontaneously, and for the most part accurately, on concrete topics and on most complex issues. I can usually support my opinion and develop hypotheses on topics of particular interest or personal expertise.	I can communicate with ease, accuracy, and fluency. I can participate fully and effectively in discussions on a variety of topics in formal and informal settings. I can discuss at length complex issues by structuring arguments and developing hypotheses.	I can communicate reflectively on a wide range of global issues and highly abstract concepts in a culturally sophisticated manner.
I can make presentations in a generally organized way on school, work, and community topics, and on topics I have researched. I can make presentations on some events and experiences in various time frames.	I can deliver organized presentations appropriate to my audience on a variety of topics. I can present information about events and experiences in various time frames.	I can deliver well-organized presentations on concrete social, academic, and professional topics. I can present detailed information about events and experiences in various time frames.	I can deliver detailed presentations, usually with accuracy, clarity and precision, on a variety of topics and issues related to community interests and some special fields of expertise.	I can deliver detailed presentations with accuracy, clarity, and precision to a wide variety of audiences on topics and issues ranging from broad general interests to areas of specialized expertise.	I can deliver sophisticated and articulate presentations on a wide range of global issues and highly abstract concepts in a culturally appropriate manner, tailored to a variety of audiences.
I can write on topics related to school, work, and community in a generally organized way. I can write some simple paragraphs about events and experiences in various time frames.	I can write on general interest, academic, and professional topics. I can write organized paragraphs about events and experiences in various time frames.	I can write on a wide variety of general interest, professional, and academic topics. I can write well-organized, detailed paragraphs in various time frames.	I can write extensively with significant precision and detail on a variety of topics, most complex issues, and some special fields of expertise.	I can write about complex and abstract issues ranging from topics of broad general interests to areas of specialized expertise using standard structure, lexicon, and writing protocols.	I can write about global issues from highly conceptualized and analytical perspectives. I can tailor my writing to sophisticated readers.
I can easily understand the main idea in messages and presentations on a variety of topics related to everyday life and personal interests and studies. I can usually understand a few details of what I overhear in conversations, even when something unexpected is expressed. I can sometimes follow what I hear about events and experiences in various time frames.	I can understand the main idea and some supporting details in organized speech on a variety of topics of personal and general interest. I can follow stories and descriptions of some length and in various time frames. I can understand information presented in a variety of genres on familiar topics, even when something unexpected is expressed.	I can understand the main idea and most supporting details on a variety of topics of personal and general interest, as well as some topics of professional interest. I can follow stories and descriptions of some length and in various time frames. I can understand information presented in most genres, even when not familiar with the topic.	I can easily follow narrative, informational, and descriptive speech. I can understand discussions on most topics that deal with special interests, unfamiliar situations, and abstract concepts. I can sometimes follow extended arguments and different points of view.	I can follow a wide range of academic and professional discourse on abstract and specialized topics. I can understand all standard dialects. I can sometimes infer complex meaning that requires deep understanding of the culture.	I can understand highly abstract and specialized speech tailored to different audiences. I can understand sophisticated language, humor, and persuasive arguments embedded with cultural references and allusions.
I can easily understand the main idea of texts related to everyday life, personal interests, and studies. I can sometimes follow stories and descriptions about events and experiences in various time frames.	I can understand the main idea and some supporting details on a variety of topics of personal and general interest. I can follow stories and descriptions of some length and in various time frames and genres.	I can understand the main idea and most supporting details in texts on a variety of topics of personal and general interest, as well as some professional topics. I can follow stories and descriptions of considerable length and in various time frames. I can understand texts written in a variety of genres, even when I am unfamiliar with the topic.	I can easily follow narrative, informational, and descriptive texts. I can understand what I read on most topics that deal with special interests, unfamiliar situations, and abstract concepts. I can sometimes understand extended arguments and different points of view.	I can follow academic, professional, and literary texts on a wide range of both familiar and unfamiliar subjects. I can sometimes infer complex meaning that requires analysis and deep understanding of the culture.	I can understand with ease and confidence highly abstract and specialized texts that are succinct or elaborate. I can follow unpredictable turns of thought. I can manage inference from within the cultural framework.

3

<sup>3</sup> The complete Can-Do Statements is forty-four pages long, which is too long to be attached as a whole, due to the page limit of the thesis.

Therefore, the current attachment includes only the statements that appeared in participants' self-assessments. Please find the complete statements on the following website: [http://ujop.cuni.cz/upload/stories/Sluzby/Can-Do\\_Statements.pdf](http://ujop.cuni.cz/upload/stories/Sluzby/Can-Do_Statements.pdf)

## Interpersonal Communication

## INTERMEDIATE MID

I can participate in conversations on familiar topics using sentences and series of sentences.  
I can handle short social interactions in everyday situations by asking and answering a variety of questions.  
I can usually say what I want to say about myself and my everyday life.

**I can start, maintain, and end a conversation on a variety of familiar topics.**

- ☐ I can be the first to start a conversation.
- ☐ I can ask for information, details, and explanations during a conversation.
- ☐ I can bring a conversation to a close.
- ☐ I can interview someone for a project or a publication.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can talk about my daily activities and personal preferences.**

- ☐ I can talk about my daily routine.
- ☐ I can talk about my interests and hobbies.
- ☐ I can give reasons for my preferences.
- ☐ I can give some information about activities I did.
- ☐ I can give some information about something I plan to do.
- ☐ I can talk about my favorite music, movies, and sports.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can use my language to handle tasks related to my personal needs.**

- ☐ I can request services, such as repair for a phone, computer, or car.
- ☐ I can schedule an appointment.
- ☐ I can inquire about membership in an organization or club.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can exchange information about subjects of special interest to me.**

- ☐ I can talk about artists from other countries.
- ☐ I can talk about historical events.
- ☐ I can talk about a mathematics, technology, or science project.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

## Interpersonal Communication

## ADVANCED LOW

I can participate in conversations about familiar topics that go beyond my everyday life. I can talk in an organized way and with some detail about events and experiences in various time frames. I can describe people, places, and things in an organized way and with some detail. I can handle a familiar situation with an unexpected complication.

**I can participate in conversations on a wide variety of topics that go beyond my everyday life.**

- ☐ I can explain absentee and sick leave policies and answer questions about them.
- ☐ I can explain current issues, such as leash laws, school dress codes, drinking age, or speed limits.
- ☐ I can discuss what is currently going on in another community or country.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can compare and contrast life in different locations and in different times.**

- ☐ I can explain how life has changed since I was a child and respond to questions on the topic.
- ☐ I can compare different jobs and study programs in a conversation with a peer.
- ☐ I can explain how technology has changed our lives while discussing this topic with another.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can resolve an unexpected complication that arises in a familiar situation.**

- ☐ I can rearrange my itinerary, such as flights, pick-up times, and appointments when I experience travel delays.
- ☐ I can tell a friend how I'm going to replace an item that I borrowed and broke/lost.
- ☐ I can explain why I was late to class or absent from work and arrange to make up the lost time.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can conduct or participate in interviews.**

- ☐ I can interview for a job or service opportunity related to my field of expertise.
- ☐ I can interview someone about his/her professional interests and activities.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**ADVANCED MID**

I can express myself fully not only on familiar topics but also on some concrete social, academic, and professional topics. I can talk in detail and in an organized way about events and experiences in various time frames. I can confidently handle routine situations with an unexpected complication. I can share my point of view in discussions on some complex issues.

**I can communicate effectively on a wide variety of present, past, and future events.**

- ☐ I can give a clear and detailed story about childhood memories, such as what happened during vacations or memorable events and answer questions about my story.
- ☐ I can give detailed descriptions about cultural events and respond to questions about them.
- ☐ I can talk about present challenges in my school or work life, such as paying for classes or dealing with difficult colleagues.
- ☐ I can discuss future plans, such as where I want to live and what I will be doing in the next few years.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can exchange general information on topics outside my fields of interest.**

- ☐ I can exchange general information about my community, such as demographic information and points of interests.
- ☐ I can exchange general information about leisure and travel, such as the world's most visited sites or most beautiful places to visit.
- ☐ I can exchange factual information about social and environmental questions, such as retirement, recycling, or pollution.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can handle a complication or unexpected turn of events.**

- ☐ I can return or exchange a purchase when a vendor makes a mistake or when parts are missing.
- ☐ I can clear up a major personal, school, or work place misunderstanding.
- ☐ I can explain an injury or illness and manage to get help.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**Interpersonal Communication****ADVANCED HIGH**

I can express myself freely and spontaneously, and for the most part accurately, on concrete topics and on most complex issues. I can usually support my opinion and develop hypotheses on topics of particular interest or personal expertise.

**I can exchange complex information about academic and professional tasks.**

- ☐ I can exchange complex information about my academic studies, such as why I chose the field, course requirements, projects, internship opportunities, and new advances in my field.
- ☐ I can exchange complex information about my work responsibilities, such as the hiring process, my work schedule, the nature of my tasks, how I interface with other employees, opportunities for advancement, and new directions in my field.
- ☐ I can exchange complex professional or academic information to engage in collaborative work with my counterparts in different regions or countries.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can exchange detailed information on topics within and beyond my fields of interest.**

- ☐ I can exchange detailed information about my personal and professional interests.
- ☐ I can exchange detailed information on technological advances.
- ☐ I can participate in conversations on social or cultural questions relevant to speakers of this language.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can support my opinion and construct hypotheses.**

- ☐ I can give a supported argument about work-related processes that would benefit me and my employer.
- ☐ I can give a supported argument about social reform, such as daycare and elder care.
- ☐ I can usually defend my views in a debate.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

## Interpersonal Communication

NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements 11

### SUPERIOR

I can communicate with ease, accuracy, and fluency. I can participate fully and effectively in discussions on a variety of topics in formal and informal settings. I can discuss at length complex issues by structuring arguments and developing hypotheses.

#### I can support my opinions clearly and precisely.

- ☐ I can explain advantages and disadvantages of various courses of action, such as whether to rent or buy a place to live.
- ☐ I can participate in technical discussions in my field.
- ☐ I can participate in a book discussion.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

#### I can discuss complex information in debates or meetings.

- ☐ I can put forth and react to others' complex ideas during a business discussion.
- ☐ I can put forth and react to others' complex ideas during a discussion to solve a community issue.
- ☐ I can participate actively and react to others appropriately in academic debates, providing some facts and rationales to back up my statements.
- ☐ I can participate actively in a friendly political debate.
- ☐ I can participate in discussions on complex social and environmental issues, such as the influence of mass media on society or government policies.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

#### I can participate with ease in complex discussions with multiple participants on a wide variety of topics.

- ☐ I can participate in an in-depth academic discussion with other students and educators who share my knowledge of the topic.
- ☐ I can skillfully relate my point of view to conversations about issues, such as foreign policy, healthcare, or environmental and economic concerns to those made by other speakers.
- ☐ I can evaluate, speculate, and hypothesize about potential consequences of a change in policy.
- ☐ I can discuss and support my opinions about how globalization has changed the world.
- ☐ I can discuss and support my opinions in an academic setting, such as collaborating with peers on a project, prioritizing staffing hires, or determining research agendas.
- ☐ I can discuss and support my recommendations in a social gathering, such as co-planning travel with friends, deliberating on the focus for a non-profit organization, or weighing the advantages and disadvantages of various technologies.
- ☐ I can discuss and support my opinions related to a business venture.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

## Presentational Speaking

NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements 15

### INTERMEDIATE MID

I can make presentations on a wide variety of familiar topics using connected sentences.

#### I can make a presentation about my personal and social experiences.

- ☐ I can describe a childhood or past experience.
- ☐ I can report on a social event that I attended.
- ☐ I can make a presentation on something new I learned.
- ☐ I can make a presentation about my plans for the future.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

#### I can make a presentation on something I have learned or researched.

- ☐ I can give a short presentation on a current event.
- ☐ I can present about a topic from an academic subject, such as science, math, art, etc.
- ☐ I can describe how to plan and carry out an event, such as a party or family reunion.
- ☐ I can give a short presentation on a famous person, landmark, or cultural event.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

#### I can make a presentation about common interests and issues and state my viewpoint.

- ☐ I can give a presentation about a favorite movie or song and tell why I like it.
- ☐ I can give a presentation about a famous person or historical figure and tell why he/she is important.
- ☐ I can share my reactions about a current event and explain why the event is in the news.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

## Presentational Speaking

## INTERMEDIATE HIGH

I can make presentations in a generally organized way on school, work, and community topics, and on topics I have researched. I can make presentations on some events and experiences in various time frames.

**I can present information on academic and work topics.**

- ☐ I can present ideas about something I have learned, such as a historical event, a famous person, or a current environmental issue.
- ☐ I can explain a series of steps needed to complete a task or experiment.
- ☐ I can explain to someone who was absent what took place in class or on the job.
- ☐ I can present my qualifications and goals for an academic program, training, or job.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can make a presentation on events, activities, and topics of particular interest.**

- ☐ I can present on something I learned from the media.
- ☐ I can make a presentation about an interesting person.
- ☐ I can summarize a personal, historical, or cultural event.
- ☐ I can give a presentation about my interests, hobbies, lifestyle, or preferred activities.
- ☐ I can make a presentation about the history or current status, of a school, organization, or company.
- ☐ I can make a presentation about future plans.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can present my point of view and provide reasons to support it.**

- ☐ I can make a presentation on rules or policies such as cell phone use, dress code, or requirements for driving and explain my viewpoint.
- ☐ I can share and justify my opinion on common issues such as allowances for children, curfews for teenagers, budget-related topics, etc.
- ☐ I can explain my point of view on current event topics such as recycling, nutrition and exercise, the food supply, conserving energy resources, extreme weather events, etc.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

## 18 NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements

## Presentational Speaking

## ADVANCED MID

I can deliver well-organized presentations on concrete social, academic, and professional topics.  
I can present detailed information about events and experiences in various time frames.

**I can present information about events of public or personal interest.**

- ☐ I can recount the details of a historical event.
- ☐ I can present in detail the plot, setting, characters, etc. of a film or book.
- ☐ I can describe in detail a social event or a local celebration.
- ☐ I can present a full account of the social and cultural activities from a recent trip or excursion.
- ☐ I can tell a story to a particular audience for dramatic effect.
- ☐ I can incorporate simple analogies into presentations.
- ☐ I can give an accurate description of something I participated in or witnessed.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can convey my ideas and elaborate on a variety of academic topics.**

- ☐ I can make presentations on a variety of subjects I have researched.
- ☐ I can teach a lesson intended for a particular audience.
- ☐ I can give detailed presentations on the process and the outcome of an experiment, research study, etc.
- ☐ I can make presentations to advocate for educational opportunities such as membership in a club, honor society, or study abroad.
- ☐ I can give a presentation on a capstone or similar summative project such as a thesis or seminar.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can give presentations with ease and detail on a wide variety of topics related to professional interests.**

- ☐ I can give a presentation about my studies, work, or organization to an outside audience.
- ☐ I can advocate for new ideas or innovative approaches related to school, work, or training.
- ☐ I can present detailed information to clients, customers, or others.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

## 20 NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements

## Presentational Speaking

## SUPERIOR

I can deliver detailed presentations with accuracy, clarity, and precision to a wide variety of audiences on topics and issues ranging from broad general interests to areas of specialized expertise.

**I can give a clearly articulated and well-structured presentation on a complex topic or issue.**

- ☐ I can provide a balance of explanations and examples on a complex topic.
- ☐ I can expound on a concept or trend in my field of specialization.
- ☐ I can give a speech on a particular controversial issue, challenging listeners to consider multiple perspectives.
- ☐ I can lecture for a variety of purpose in a way that aligns the presentation with intended objectives.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can adapt the language in my presentation for casual, professional, or general public audiences.**

- ☐ I can use both informal to formal speech when speaking to a mixed group.
- ☐ I can use specialized language or jargon targeted to a particular audience.
- ☐ I can simplify my speech for younger or less informed audiences.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can depart from the prepared text of my presentation when appropriate.**

- ☐ I can speak extemporaneously to clarify or expand on points in a presentation.
- ☐ I can fill in gaps to address the audience's lack of knowledge on a particular topic.
- ☐ I can restructure my presentation to reflect a particular point of view.
- ☐ I can effortlessly reformulate what I want to say when interrupted or misunderstood.
- ☐ I can confidently present on a complex topic to an audience unfamiliar with the topic and make adjustments as needed to meet the needs of the audience.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

## 24 NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements

## Presentational Writing

## INTERMEDIATE MID

I can write on a wide variety of familiar topics using connected sentences.

**I can write messages and announcements.**

- ☐ I can write a message to explain or clarify something.
- ☐ I can write about common events and daily routines.
- ☐ I can write an autobiographical statement for a contest, study abroad or other special program, or job application.
- ☐ I can write an invitation or flyer about an event I am planning.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can write short reports about something I have learned or researched.**

- ☐ I can write a short article on a current event.
- ☐ I can write about an academic subject, such as science, math, art, etc.
- ☐ I can write the minutes or a debrief from a club or other meeting.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can compose communications for public distribution.**

- ☐ I can create a flyer for an upcoming event at my school or at work.
- ☐ I can write a review of a movie, book, play, exhibit, etc.
- ☐ I can post an entry to a blog or a discussion forum.
- ☐ I can compose a simple letter, response, or article for a publication.
- ☐ I can contribute to a school or work publication.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

## 26 NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements

## Presentational Writing

## ADVANCED MID

I can write on a wide variety of general interest, professional, and academic topics.  
I can write well-organized, detailed paragraphs in various time frames.

**I can write well organized texts for a variety of academic purposes.**

- ☐ I can write a research paper on a topic related to my studies or area of specialization.
- ☐ I can write a proposal for a project or a research study.
- ☐ I can write a newspaper and/or magazine article about an event, project, or research initiative.
- ☐ I can write content for instructional resources.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can write well organized texts for a variety of professional purposes.**

- ☐ I can write letters of recommendation.
- ☐ I can write a project proposal or a report.
- ☐ I can write about the results of a survey and the recommendations that might follow.
- ☐ I can write a statement for a job application.
- ☐ I can write performance reviews or project evaluations.
- ☐ I can write brochures or other resources for clients or customers.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can write well organized texts for a variety of general interest purposes.**

- ☐ I can write an article for a special interest magazine.
- ☐ I can write a family or community history.
- ☐ I can write brochures or other resources for community events or fundraising.
- ☐ I can write promotional materials.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_



**ADVANCED HIGH**

I can write extensively with significant precision and detail on a variety of topics, most complex issues, and some special fields of expertise.

**I can write using target language and culture conventions to present and elaborate a point of view.**

- ☐ I can write a position paper on an issue I have researched or related to my field of expertise.
- ☐ I can express a detailed point of view in a blog or other public forum.
- ☐ I can write an editorial piece in order to speculate on outcomes or implications of an issue.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can write using target language and culture conventions for informal purposes.**

- ☐ I can write a personal mission statement.
- ☐ I can write a statement of purpose related to my professional goals.
- ☐ I can write entries in a reflection journal.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can write using target language and culture conventions for formal purposes.**

- ☐ I can write an in-depth research paper.
- ☐ I can write a policy statement.
- ☐ I can contribute to a strategic plan.
- ☐ I can create a professional portfolio.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**Presentational Writing**NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements **27****SUPERIOR**

I can write about complex and abstract issues ranging from topics of broad general interests to areas of specialized expertise using standard structure, lexicon, and writing protocols.

**I can write effectively about complex and abstract issues of general interest.**

- ☐ I can write an analysis piece for a literary magazine or other similar publications.
- ☐ I can write a comprehensive policy statement challenging readers to consider multiple perspectives.
- ☐ I can write personal imaginative texts, such as a film or drama script, following established conventions of the genre.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can write about complex and abstract issues on academic and professional topics.**

- ☐ I can write extensively on a concept or trend in my field of specialization.
- ☐ I can write an article for submission to a professional or specialized journal.
- ☐ I can write using specialized or professional vocabulary.
- ☐ I can write an academic thesis or dissertation.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can develop an argument using the writing mechanics and organizational style of the target language and culture.**

- ☐ I can accurately apply the standard punctuation of the target language.
- ☐ I can write using appropriate grammatical structures of the target language.
- ☐ I can structure my prose to reflect the way in which arguments are structured and elaborated in target language writing.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

## Interpretive Listening

NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements 31

## ADVANCED MID

I can understand the main idea and most supporting details on a variety of topics of personal and general interest, as well as some topics of professional interest. I can follow stories and descriptions of some length and in various time frames. I can understand information presented in most genres, even when not familiar with the topic.

**I can understand the main idea and many details of descriptions or interviews.**

- ☐ I can understand an interview with a famous person, such as a rock star, politician, or actor.
- ☐ I can understand a Web-based presentation giving a virtual tour of a city, a museum, or university.
- ☐ I can understand an introduction that outlines the achievements of a speaker.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can understand accounts of events.**

- ☐ I can understand a voicemail message on how someone missed a meeting because of an accident.
- ☐ I can understand a family member recounting an event in a recorded memoir.
- ☐ I can understand some autobiographical details of a well-known science figure.
- ☐ I can understand a commentator's summary of a sporting event on TV.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can understand directions and instructions on everyday tasks.**

- ☐ I can understand multi-step instructions in a recipe presented on TV or YouTube.
- ☐ I can understand when a friend tells me how to play a sport or game.
- ☐ I can understand the details when a teacher presents how to complete a homework assignment to the class.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

32 NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements

## Interpretive Listening

## ADVANCED HIGH

I can easily follow narrative, informational, and descriptive speech. I can understand discussions on most topics that deal with special interests, unfamiliar situations, and abstract concepts. I can sometimes follow extended arguments and different points of view.

**I can easily understand detailed reports and exposés.**

- ☐ I can understand an interview in which the relationship of texting and traffic accidents is detailed by victims' reports on their experiences.
- ☐ I can understand a radio report on the increased crime rate in the community that includes descriptions of specific incidents of crime.
- ☐ I can understand a televised exposé on celebrities as heroes.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can often understand various viewpoints in extended arguments.**

- ☐ I can follow the argument when students debate the advantages and disadvantages of study abroad supported by examples of their personal experiences.
- ☐ I can understand the main points made in a conversation I overhear where two people are arguing the pros and cons of social networking.
- ☐ I can understand a YouTube debate on the legal age of drinking.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can understand discussions and presentations on many concrete and abstract topics.**

- ☐ I can understand the benefits of marathon running as detailed in a podcast.
- ☐ I can understand many points made in a YouTube presentation advocating for changes to immigration laws.
- ☐ I can understand a group leader's justification for protesting a cut in programs.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

## Interpretive Listening

NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements 33

### SUPERIOR

I can follow a wide range of academic and professional discourse on abstract and specialized topics. I can understand all standard dialects. I can sometimes infer complex meaning that requires deep understanding of the culture.

#### I can understand a variety of abstract and technical topics within my field of expertise.

- ☐ I can understand a lecture on my favorite subject.
- ☐ I can understand a scientific argument.
- ☐ I can understand a speech on a historical period.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

#### I can understand discussions on various issues of general interest.

- ☐ I can understand the points of view of a televised political debate between candidates running for office.
- ☐ I can understand the debate teams' opposing ideas on the funding of arts at school.
- ☐ I can understand a panel discussion on a school or city policy.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

#### I can understand implications and inferences in discussions or presentations.

- ☐ I can follow the discussion on a talk show about the implications of global warming.
- ☐ I can follow the arguments at a public meeting of a parent who opposes a school closing.
- ☐ I can follow a politician's speech on health care policies.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

36 NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements

## Interpretive Reading

### INTERMEDIATE HIGH

I can easily understand the main idea of texts related to everyday life, personal interests, and studies. I can sometimes follow stories and descriptions about events and experiences in various time frames.

#### I can understand accounts of personal events or experiences.

- ☐ I can understand information about an upcoming excursion, such as a class trip or company event.
- ☐ I can understand a friend's postcard describing a family vacation.
- ☐ I can understand descriptions of a Peace Corps volunteer's daily life.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

#### I can sometimes follow short, written instructions when supported by visuals.

- ☐ I can follow the instructions to use an ATM.
- ☐ I can follow the instructions to make an online purchase.
- ☐ I can follow simple directions to do an experiment in a science class.
- ☐ I can understand the basic instructions for playing a video game.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

#### I can understand the main idea of and a few supporting facts about famous people and historic events.

- ☐ I can read a short summary of a historical figure's accomplishments.
- ☐ I can understand the main idea and a few supporting facts about a scientific discovery from a summarized description.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

## Interpretive Reading

NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements 37

## ADVANCED MID

I can understand the main idea and most supporting details in texts on a variety of topics of personal and general interest, as well as some professional topics. I can follow stories and descriptions of considerable length and in various time frames. I can understand texts written in a variety of genres, even when I am unfamiliar with the topic.

**I can follow the general idea and some details of what is written in a variety of stories and autobiographical accounts.**

- ☐ I can follow the chronological plot in a simple short story.
- ☐ I can follow news articles reporting on community events.
- ☐ I can follow a short online autobiography.
- ☐ I can follow a cover letter and a resume.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can understand general information on topics outside my field of interest.**

- ☐ I can understand the details about a police report on a recent crime.
- ☐ I can understand the details of a job or performance evaluation.
- ☐ I can understand the details of an article about a sporting or cultural event.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can understand messages on a wide variety of past, present, and future events.**

- ☐ I can understand an email message explaining details about the rescheduling of an event.
- ☐ I can understand the details in a message about why someone missed an important meeting.
- ☐ I can understand detailed descriptions about a service learning project or a volunteer experience.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

38 NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements

## Interpretive Reading

## ADVANCED HIGH

I can easily follow narrative, informational, and descriptive texts. I can understand what I read on most topics that deal with special interests, unfamiliar situations, and abstract concepts. I can sometimes understand extended arguments and different points of view.

**I can understand narrative, descriptive, and informational texts of any length.**

- ☐ I can understand a detailed account of a unique travel or cultural experience.
- ☐ I can understand the minutes of a student club meeting that describes new by-laws.
- ☐ I can understand the new perspectives of a musical group in an article that describes the direction taken in their latest CD.
- ☐ I can understand most documents outlining rules and regulations, such as an apartment rental contract.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can read about most topics of special interest.**

- ☐ I can understand a report that describes policy changes, for example, related to admission into a program or changes to social networking platforms.
- ☐ I can follow the reporting of national or international news, such as an election, a natural disaster, or civil unrest.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

**I can read most general fiction and non-fiction.**

- ☐ I can understand most short stories, plays, and novels.
- ☐ I can understand most inferences and allusions.
- ☐ I can understand non-fiction texts that are specialized and complex in nature, such as essays, documentaries, technical documentation, etc.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

## Interpretive Reading

NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements **39**

### SUPERIOR

I can follow academic, professional, and literary texts on a wide range of both familiar and unfamiliar subjects.  
I can sometimes infer complex meaning that requires analysis and deep understanding of the culture.

#### I can analyze the primary argument and supporting details.

- ☐ I can interpret editorials.
- ☐ I can read a position statement and understand the inferences.
- ☐ I can understand a detailed analysis.
- ☐ I can understand a literary review.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

#### I can understand detailed information within and beyond my fields of interest.

- ☐ I can understand a technical report within my field.
- ☐ I can understand a journal article in my field.
- ☐ I can read most academic or professional articles unrelated to my field.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

#### I can comprehend complex texts on abstract topics of interest to me.

- ☐ I can read an article advocating for educational reform to meet global needs.
- ☐ I can read an editorial on international environmental policies.
- ☐ I can read texts about comparative religious or political philosophies.
- ☐ I can \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F. Follow-Up Interview Protocols

The individual interview is about your feelings of self-efficacy as an English learner and user, combined with some questions related to the questionnaire that you just filled out. Most of the questions are open-ended. The interview will be audio-recorded for further data analysis, but the responses that you give in this interview will be kept confidential. With an estimated time of one hour, the interview is going to take place in a group study room or quiet café according to your preference. Either Chinese or English can be the language for communication at your ease. The following guiding questions may not be exactly the same as those going to be used in our real conversation. The information you provide will help us to better understand our research. We really appreciate your honest and detailed responses. The interview is totally voluntary. You can withdraw from the interview at any time you want.

Question 1: How do you like the questionnaire you just finished? Do you think it could reflect your real proficiency level?

Question 2: What are the reasons that you classify yourself to certain benchmarks in the first place? In other words, why did you label yourself as “novice” or “intermediate” in terms of the five aspects (e.g. based on language use experience, or comments from other people, or previous test score, or pure self-perception)?

Question 3: Did you switch your first-choice benchmark after reading through the statements? If so, did you change to a lower or higher benchmark?

Question 4: Did you hesitate a lot at any statements? Can you elaborate a little bit?

Question 5: Did any of the Can-Do Statements remind you of any highlights in your language learning or language use that you would like to share?

Question 6: By looking back at your first assignment/ your first presentation as well as the instructor's feedback at McGill, do you remember how you felt before the assignment/ presentation? Were you sure enough that you would finish it well before the due date? Were you confident in yourself during the preparation process?

Question 7: How did you feel when you were presenting? How did you feel when you read the feedback from your peers or professors? Has any of those feelings influenced your attitude towards the English language use and learning?

Question 8: Do you remember any experience that boosted or slackened your self-efficacy beliefs?

Question 9: In your opinion, what could be the most influential elements for shaping your self-efficacy beliefs?

Question 10: What efforts did you try to make progress on linguistic efficacy beliefs? Did you expect or seek any help from any person or organization to improve your linguistic proficiency or efficacy beliefs? Why or why not?

Question 11: What support from your cohorts, or teachers, or program, or school do you think will be helpful in promoting your self-efficacy beliefs?