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Literature and Truth in Enrique Vila-Matas

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Abstract—A postmodern approach helps the Spanish novelist Enrique Vila-Matas overcome the dichotomy between literature and reality and between desire and facts as the solution is to combine both elements. However, this does not mean he accepts all postmodernist characteristics, as accepting hermeneutic truth allows him to propose an aesthetic and even moral ideal that affirms the existence of a truth and certain values that go beyond absolute postmodern relativism.

Index Terms—literature, reality, fiction, truth, morals

I. INTRODUCTION

By 2010 the Spanish author Enrique Vila-Matas was enjoying great success in his career as a writer. He had achieved popularity with readers with his works translated from Spanish into over thirty languages, he was well regarded by specialist critics, and he had been recognised by official institutions. In fact, in the space of just a few years, he published, among other texts, the ones that are almost unanimously regarded as his best works, the books that comprise what his then publisher, Jorge Herralde, called *La Catedral Metaliteraria* (The Metaliterary Cathedral) Vila-Matas (2008b). This trilogy comprises the novels *Bartleby y compañía* (Bartelby and Company), published in 2000 and winner of prizes such as the Ciudad de Barcelona in Spain, the prize for the best foreign book published in France and the Fernando Aguirre prize from French booksellers, *El mal de Montano* (Montano's Affliction), published in 2002 and winner of prizes such as the Herralde prize for novels and the Premio Nacional de la Crónica in Spain, the Círculo de Críticos de Chile prize, the Médicis prize for the best foreign novel published in France and the Ennio Flaiano international literature prize in Italy, and finally *Doctor Pasavento*, published in 2005 and winner of the Real Academia Española prize and the Fundación Lara prize for the best novel of the year in Spain and the Mondello international literary prize in Italy. In 2006 he was also made a Knight of France's Legion of Honour in recognition of his work as a whole.

In the midst of this official and public recognition and with his next novel, *Dublinesca* (Dublinesque) — another immediate success — about to appear, Vila-Matas published a short book called *Perder teorías* (Losing Theories) which went largely unnoticed. In this text, mid-way between narrative and essay, he presented what he called “the elements — inescapable, essential — that should feature in any future novel that aims to be relevant to the new century” Vila-Matas (2010). He would adhere closely to these five criteria in his forthcoming novel, but they were also already apparent in his earlier works and, indeed, they comprise a general theory of the novel or a true literary theory that can function as an ideal tool for analysing the constant aspects present in all of his work, as well as his basic intentions. These five essential features are:

1. “Intertextuality” (in inverted commas).
2. Connections to fine poetry.
3. Writing as a clock moving forwards.
4. The dominance of style over plot.
5. An awareness of a ruinous moral landscape. Each of these aspects will now be considered in depth.

II. “INTERTEXTUALITY”

In various explanatory texts and interviews, Vila-Matas places his work in a tradition starting with the great Modernist authors such as Charles Baudelaire, Herman Melville, James Joyce, Marcel Proust, Franz Kafka, Fernando Pessoa and Robert Walser and continuing with other writers like Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino and Vladimir Nabokov, authors who use their oeuvre to enquire into the unity that underlies all of the multitude of forms and manifestations in which modern human existence occurs, who seek out the essence or meaning of the reality that surrounds them in order to find their own place in it. Situated in a reality that simultaneously includes and disconcerts them, these authors stop seeing art in general and literature in particular as a mere entertainment. Instead it becomes a privileged instrument that makes it possible to understand the spirit of the age and find its deepest meaning. The aim, then, is to go somewhere neither philosophy nor science can reach, weighed down as they are by their rationalism and methodological rigour and their aspiration to exhaustive explanation.

This current in postmodernism eventually culminates in a series of authors who turn the question about the essence and meaning of reality into one about the status of fiction and its relationship with reality. These are authors, such as Claudio Magris, W. G. Sebald and Sergio Pitol who propose a new path for the novel, one that Vila-Matas explicitly follows:

In *Bartleby y compañía*, by mixing essays with narrative, I merely joined a contemporary line in a way that I felt was almost innate to me and in any case derived from my *Historia abreviada de la literatura portátil* (A Brief History of Portable Literature) — the line of the Magris of *Danube*, or the Pitol of *El arte de la fuga* (The Art of Escaping), or the Sebald of *The Emigrants* — one that proposes a different path for the novel, a path that combines essay and narrative. (...) It is a way of defining this genre, which is gaining ground in the contemporary novel. It is a hybrid genre that stands out as a mixture of autobiography, reportage and invention. It is a genre that suggests broadening the terms of the novel. In English it is called <<faction>>, another example of their capacity for synthesis and their pragmatism and ingenuity when classifying things Vila-Matas (2013).

The word “faction”, combining “fact” and “fiction”, perfectly summarizes this new current that fully and deliberately forms part of the postmodern plurality announced by Nietzsche and described by authors such as Foucault and Baudrillard. There is no longer a single structure underpinning reality that we can know, nor is there even a single representable reality or totality but instead all sorts of realities or forms of existence that touch, collide, superimpose and separate, generating all sorts of mixtures and combinations, a plurality comprising multiple heterogeneous elements that occur successively. The real is not just what happens or is produced, but also what each subject feels or experiences, even what they imagine. The essence is no longer in the actions of the subjects but instead in their behaviour, behaviour that includes their actions along with what they feel, experience, desire, fear or imagine while acting.

But if fiction can be part of reality, then a novel is real, it is part of reality, it exists, so what stops reality from being part of fiction? More consciously and radically than in Modernist authors, the response to the dichotomy between the real and the literary, between what happens and what is imagined or desired or feared, is no longer for one aspect to win out over another but instead for the two to fuse. It is a matter of finding the intermediate space between the two where people become and dwell; writing no longer tries to explain the world but instead aspires to expand the boundaries of the human, as all that exists outside the text is another text. The imagination no longer distances us from reality; it is the key that gives us access to its inner walls. Consequently, works are produced in which the factual and the imaginary combine, documents combine with fiction, the author’s own texts and texts by others, and in which everything is true because everything is invented. In the language of the Classics: *Fortis imaginatio generat casum*, a strong imagination begetteth chance.

It is with this conception as his starting point that Vila-Matas regards intertextuality, or the explicit links one text has with another text, as an unavoidable characteristic of the twenty-first century. “Intertextuality”, he states, is not something negative but rather something unavoidable: “We should not fool ourselves: we always write after others” Vila-Matas (2010). Although this is something that should be used appropriately, not comprising mere plagiarism or repetition of someone else’s content. Authors draw on the materials life provides, but they also grow “mysteriously” based on other books, using these materials that have become part of their own experience if they “welcome them warmly”, if they “absorb” and “transform” them in their own presentation. This is a process of welcoming, absorbing and transformation, a legitimate appropriation that Vila-Matas tries to specify when he states that he supports “intertextuality” in inverted commas. In his work it reaches a point where real quotations and references are mixed with other completely invented ones in a process he describes as a complex but joyous game Vila-Matas (2010).

III. CONNECTIONS WITH FINE POETRY

Of the five essential features of the literary theory Vila-Matas proposes in *Perder teorías*, the second (connections with fine poetry) is among the less well explained ones, with just a few brief reflections and statements about how important it is for the novel never to lose its subtle connections with fine poetry, about how desirable it is to combine surrealism, metaphysics and primitive myths in an original way, and finally, personal memories of the impact some works had on him, especially Julien Gracq’s work which is omnipresent throughout the book, and *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* by Elizabeth Smart.

However, we agree with Júlía González de Canales when she notes in her study of Vila-Matas that the observations in question show that the second feature “does not so much refer to the inclusion of poetical stanzas in the body of the narrative but rather to the possibility that the text itself maintains a lyrical attitude” González de Canales (2016). It is therefore a matter of the text being stylized and never losing its connections to fine poetry and its capacity for dialogue with the poetical tradition, thus becoming a narrative-poetical text that enables different meanings to be created. This aspect is fundamental for distinguishing between a novel that is good and one that is not.

IV. WRITING AS A CLOCK MOVING FORWARDS

Vila-Matas also does not provide any specific explanation in this text of the third feature he describes, writing as a clock moving forwards. However, in this case we do have the help of other texts by him in which he tackles this

question, in particular the article “Mastroianni-sur-mer”, included in the collection *El viento ligero en Palma* (Light Wind in Palma), published in Mexico in 2004 and republished in Spain in 2008.

In this article, quoting Claudio Magris, he notes that “writing involves transforming life into the past, in other words, aging”, making it clear in the rest of the article that this aging process does not mean giving up or stopping, taking refuge in mere nostalgia for the past, but, on the contrary, ushering in nostalgia for the future Vila-Matas, (2008). The writer thus becomes someone who perseveres, who understands that we inhabit the passage of time as possibility or change, and who therefore constantly maintains an open and creative attitude to the world and other people, someone who becomes, who evolves in his own process of development. Remembering moments or events from his childhood, some real and some invented, is common in Vila-Matas’s own writing, and it consequently does not mean pausing but instead forms part of this process of becoming in the passage of time, as one always remembers from the present looking towards the future.

It is through writing that the writer becomes aware of time, settling into a temporal ecstasy or eternal present in which what has already been or could have been, what is being and still has not been or may yet be, coincide. A temporal conjunction or intersection of possibilities from which the writer relates to reality, thus becoming a subject. This aspect is intimately related to the fourth feature of poetics he presents, the dominance of style over plot.

V. THE DOMINANCE OF STYLE OVER PLOT

After putting forward “intertextuality”, connections with fine poetry and writing as a clock moving forwards, Vila-Matas explains the most recognisable feature of his theory of literature, the dominance of style over plot, a feature that is in a way prepared or framed by the previous ones. He goes on to describe how the work of Gracq and comments by authors such as John Banville helped him to free himself from a commonly held view that had worn him down since his youth, the idea that plot should be privileged over style when telling a story Vila-Matas (2010).

It is evident that if we position ourselves in the realist tradition, in which, in Stendahl’s famous expression, a novel is a mirror carried along a high road, the essence of a narrative is what it depicts and how it depicts it, what it describes or explains. But if literature is no longer seen as a narration about the world and becomes its effect on the world, if the text stops being seen as a description of reality and the subjects that inhabit it and instead becomes the creation of a reality where a continuously open process occurs in which the author becomes himself, then the style becomes the essence, allowing the author to understand something of himself and the potential reader to receive content that can be used to create and understand their own circumstances.

In line with the postmodern philosophical tradition that runs from Friedrich Nietzsche to Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, and in the literary strand described above of Claudio Magris and W. G. Sebald, Vila-Matas claims that the world is no longer experienced as an absolute totality that is ordered and predictable but instead has become something fragmentary and driven by chance, a plural structure comprising all manner of heterogenous elements that break with any expectations and that cannot be reflected in great plots, Roas (2007). There is no longer a totality of meaning to impart the objective facts, rationalism and conditions of any constituent discourse and within which the life of a subject develops, a subject that is created in accordance with the processes of subject formation and that expresses or explains its own subjectivity through the acceptable discourse, either in an essay or a novel.

Writers can therefore no longer aspire to explain the world, but instead through their own discursive form they can attempt to reflect a fragment or moment of this world in which they can construct and understand themselves. As stated by the protagonist of *El mal de Montano*, the author’s alter ego, at a point where literature is being discussed:

I make the word. And I make theory, and I tell you, I share with monsieur the idea that the world can no longer be recreated like in the old novels, that is, from the writer’s *unique* perspective. Monsieur and I believe that the world has *disintegrated*, and one can only offer a credible image if one dares to show it in its dissolution, Vila-Matas (2002).

This process of composition is the key to “the disappearance of the subject”, the true leitmotif of Vila-Matas’s metaliterary trilogy. One way or another, the protagonists of these three novels, each one a different representation of the author, attempt to disappear, but this disappearance is not so much a will to cease existing materially or physically but rather a desire to become their own self, to invent this self outside the accepted rules and procedures, a desire to turn into someone who happens or occurs, tracing, and achieving or not achieving their own possibilities in the passage of time, going beyond what social mores consider legitimate, normal or productive, a desire to become a flâneur wandering around, Oñoro (2015).

Consequently, all of Vila-Matas’s works are an expression of this poetic principle in which style takes precedence over the plot. Whether they are novels or essays, they form a mosaic of texts, readings, citations and memories, real or not, that comment on each other and metamorphosize, breaking with the idea of a narrative continuum or a higher logic to which they must answer. They are stories that create themselves in the course of their own writing, a narrative of events that sketch a chance counter to any idea of need and independently of the narrative causality of realist literature, tapestries that weave themselves capriciously in multiple directions, and in which philosophical reflection mixes with a fragment from a newspaper, a scene in a film, an anecdote or a biographical event, building a shared territory where the invented and the true coexist, Pozuelo Yvancos (2010), and on which basis the author builds his subjectivity or represented self at the same time as making it available to his own consciousness and that of others.

VI. AN AWARENESS OF A RUINOUS MORAL LANDSCAPE

The fifth feature of Vila-Matas's proposed poetics, an awareness of a ruinous moral landscape, combines and uses the four previous features, giving the set a certain coherence. Consequently, it states that just as a work of literature should be like a clock moving forwards, in other words it should maintain a creative attitude towards reality and look to the future; it must also be like a mirror that moves forwards. This ability to move forwards does not mean that it becomes a prophetic literature, something that is not at all interesting, but that it is a work of perception that can prefigure a moral landscape, making it possible to understand better the present. He mentions Kafka's work, in which waiting is the essential condition of the human being, and, again, *The Opposing Shore* by Julien Gracq as:

Gracq's book is in this current of authors with mirrors that move forwards. It appears to be aware of the core of our current problem: the situation of absolute impossibility, the individual's powerlessness in the face of the devastating machinery of power, of the political system, Vila-Matas (2010).

According to Vila-Matas, from the 20th century onwards, politicians and writers, history and poetry, started speaking two different languages. Furthermore, after the end of the Second World War, there was nothing that could be narrated left in the continent as everything had now happened, and so, with nothing left to happen, we came to live in a painful nothingness, Vila-Matas (2010). After the storm, we submerged ourselves in pure endless activity, a "great void caused by that immense pride of thinking that, with the gods dead, we are the only immortals in existence". An absolute void, the absolute decadence of the western world and of modern life, the nullification of people under the socio-political machinery and mere instrumental or survival activities, in the face of which a true literary work must offer the possibility of utopia, Vila-Matas (2010).

This statement about how the genuinely literary has an undoubted moral mission could at first be somewhat disconcerting, and yet it is something that is present throughout Vila-Matas's oeuvre. Without looking further, in *El mal de Montano*, mentioned above, the sickness of a literature reduced, on the one hand, to publishing just bestsellers that contribute nothing, and, on the other hand, to the leaden deconstruction or merely theoretical analysis of literary texts is denounced:

If someone should be off their map, it is me; I am an old-fashioned critic, one who opposes the ferocious and Kabbalistic jargon that has spread through universities in the United States, where professors and critics speak of literature with such indifference towards the aesthetic, moral or political element of literature strictly speaking that it could be said that it has disappeared under the rubble of theory, Vila-Matas (2002).

Vila-Matas maintains that literature is, in effect, under assault from an almost endless number of dilettantes, who write without having any particular capability, and is being subjected to a merely commercial perspective that turns everything into a product, plunging readers into a state of great confusion, all of this without it being defended in any way by professors and critics who spend their time deconstructing literary texts with no purpose beyond simple intellectual games. Therefore, Vila-Matas goes so far as to affirm that:

As for literature, it has almost disappeared. I also think that ninety-nine per cent of people do not know what it is. This is what some of my least-understood books in Spain cover, Vila-Matas (2013).

Consequently, he defends a literature that points to something more, that is critical of the present and can harbour a utopia or hope, that simultaneously has an aesthetic, moral and political aim. This aspiration seems hard to reconcile with Vila-Matas's apparent acceptance of a postmodernism characterized by its most radical relativism and by accepting the absence of truth as the ultimate truth. And yet it is possible to say that these two aspects are consistent with each other, so long as it is understood that the truth Vila-Matas defends goes far beyond simple relativistic postmodernist truth and is actually much closer to the concept of truth in the hermeneutics of authors such as Hans-Georg Gadamer.

VII. HERMENEUTIC TRUTH

As is well-known, the traditional concept of truth is what is known as truth as correspondence, a concept upheld by realism and the only one apparently acceptable to common sense.

According to realism, facts or events that exist in the real world have a single, specific manner: what has happened is what has happened, what someone says or thinks is something concrete and specific, this table is like this, and so on. On this basis, we can establish that truth is how human understanding corresponds with the thing or fact that exists or occurs: the object. Truth is the correspondence between what is in one's comprehension and what the object is, and so truth and knowledge are closely linked. Knowledge is the relationship between a subject and an object, a process by which the subject leaves its sphere and captures the features of the object before returning to itself and being aware of what has been captured. The subject forms the image of the object in this way — not, however, naïvely — since it is necessary to consider that what is understood is included in the subject's experiential relationship and through its own cognitive structures. Knowledge is not the object as it is in itself, but rather the representation or image the subject makes of the object, and this representation can be accurate or inaccurate. If the features of the object are somehow reproduced in the image, the knowledge is true; if there is a discrepancy, it is not true. It is erroneous.

Truth or non-truth is thus a first level in representation and a second level in the combination of representations or judgement, and it is defined as the combination or concordance of the content of the representation, or of the content of

the combination of representations, with the object, while the object cannot be true or not-true; it is what it is in itself. If I say, “This table is white”, the truth or falsehood is not in the table, the object itself, but instead in the statement about the object, in the judgement or combination of the representation “table” and the representation “white” that refers to the object. This judgement will be true or false according to whether the representation I make in my mind matches the object (whether or not it is a table), and according to whether or not the link I make in my mind between the representations agrees with the link that is made in the object (whether or not it is a white table).

This traditional concept is what relativism questions, especially since Nietzsche in the late nineteenth century. Relativism claims that there is never a direct access to the fact or the thing — the object — that my personal structure is always between the object and the ego. This structure includes physiological elements as well as my own experiences, desires, fears, and so on. In other words, if five people are looking at a table, the table does not have a single form and the people who look at it or judge it do not approach this form and the truth with more or less success, but instead the table has five forms, one for each person, all of which have the same truth. They are all real.

It is not true that there is an object that exists or is produced in a single form, since the table is only a table for human beings. It is human beings who give the sense or meaning of table to something that is there, and without human beings this could be any other thing, but not a table. Consequently, according to Nietzsche, there are no facts but instead only interpretations of the facts, different interpretations by each person who contemplates the fact from their own circumstance and experience, seeing it or introducing their own desires and meanings into it, Nietzsche (2004). For some the table might be large, for others small, for some, beautiful, for others ugly, and so on. No one interpretation is better than any other, although one will generally impose itself through convenience, conviction or the will of the strongest party. Therefore, there is no truth, strictly speaking, and the world is not a fact but rather an invention, a set of observations in constant flux, Nietzsche (2006).

Finally, the concept of hermeneutic truth appears between truth as correspondence and relativistic truth. This follows the phenomenological tradition and is expressly formulated by Hans-Georg Gadamer in his work *Truth and Method* from 1960. According to this new approach, the concept of truth as correspondence based on the match between the representation or image in the mind of the subject and the exterior object in question cannot be denied. This correspondence, furthermore, can be checked or verified through sensory experience. This is the objective truth of the physical-mathematical or experimental sciences; in more specifically human experiences, we find another type of truth. When analysing the writings of a philosopher, we study a fact from the past. We apply general legal rules to a specific case or we reflect on divinity. When we contemplate a painting, we face the representation of a spectacle. When we read a poem or listen to music, we access a truth that cannot be verified in the same way that statements about the material world are verified.

In the experience of art, the experience of philosophy or any experience of the historical tradition that goes beyond simple investigation or listing of facts, we do not restrict ourselves to empirical knowledge of something that is merely external to us or in front of us, like the objects of science in relation to the subject, but instead we occupy ourselves with something that involves and affects us, something we are trying to understand. This is not a piece of content relating to knowledge that can be disconnected from us or that is mentioned objectively; it is a possibility of ours, a knowledge that is simultaneously self-knowledge. When understanding something like a historical fact or a poem, we experience it in a way that goes beyond the merely objective and we access a comprehensive or extra-scientific truth that we connect using all of our experience of the world. Consequently, we are concerned with how we are and how we feel, how we live. We understand ourselves and participate in a hermeneutic or understanding universe in which we are open, Gadamer (1977).

There is, therefore, no rejection of knowledge or of the objective truth that the physical-mathematical or experimental sciences provide, but instead the affirmation that these objective types of knowledge and truths must be completed by another different type of knowledge or truth, the knowledge or truth that appear in various participation-based experiences of the human being. These experiences even predate merely objective experiences, and in them the human being seeks a meaning or foundation, a place in this totality of which the individual is part, in which we participate, and which we call reality or world. This is not a case of subjects who encounter a work of art or a text that transmits a conceptual meaning to them, but of subjects who face something that occurs and consequently come to know themselves. They access the hermeneutic truth and become aware of themselves as specific parts of the totality that is the world, while at the same time, what has occurred takes shape and acquires a full identity; it is there as what it is and only as what it is, in itself and not as a mere construct.

However, this means that for the aesthetic experience that makes it possible to access hermeneutic truth to occur, it is not enough for a person to contemplate a painting or attend a theatre production as a spectator. The aesthetic experience requires subjects to react with passion and go beyond the objective appearance of the work, for there to be a play of representation in which subjects let themselves go completely, ceasing to be dominant consciousnesses while the work simultaneously acquires meaning and identity insofar as it happens or is created, in that someone contemplates or watches it, Gadamer (1977).

According to Gadamer, aesthetic experience is not fully subjective or fully objective. Instead, it is a participatory process in which the subject in some way loses its identity in order to recover it more fully. A theatrical performance needs the ensemble made up of the actors who by performing the play enable it to occur or make itself present, and

spectators before whom the play occurs. On the one hand, the play occurs or is created, the reality becomes manifest, and on the other hand, the subject who experiences this reality is transformed, Zúñiga (1995). This requires a series of clarifications:

1. Firstly, and unlike what happens in the traditional theory of knowledge used in the natural sciences, in aesthetic comprehension it is not possible to distinguish between truth and meaning. According to the traditional theory of knowledge, a fact or judgement has meaning if it is rational, if it refers to something, if it has a purpose or an aim. Only then can there be truth or non-truth, something that must be verified or tested by experience. But if there is meaning in aesthetic comprehension, there is already truth. The truth or meaning is the thing that happens and that subjects incorporate into their experience of the world and of themselves. Furthermore, there cannot even be false or erroneous aesthetic comprehension, but instead something occurs or does not occur, hermeneutic truth happens or does not happen.

2. Secondly, if a human being's comprehension of a work of art or a text from the past is mediated by this person's particular characteristics and by the era inhabited, then it is shaped by the individual's own historical perspective. This appears to lead to relativism, to the claim that works of art and historical texts do not exist in themselves, that they do not have a unique meaning, that there is no absolute truth, just different possible interpretations. But according to Gadamer, works of art or historical texts do exist in themselves. What happens is that they do not reveal themselves in a single situation or moment as a completed whole, but they gradually reveal different aspects of themselves, they create themselves, based on the different aesthetic experiences or historical understandings that derive from different subjects and come together to form the work of art or historical text, giving them their meaning or truth. *Hamlet* did not end when Shakespeare decided he had completed it; instead, every time someone attends a performance of *Hamlet* or reads it and is moved by it, this experience also forms part of *Hamlet*. Despite Gadamer's hermeneutics frequently being described as relativistic, he believes that seeing truth as something purely historical does not lead to relativism, as in its process of development the truth becomes objective and rises above the subjective contingency of any starting point.

VIII. THE HERMENEUTIC TRUTH OF VILA MATAS

As we have seen, postmodernism enables Vila-Matas to overcome the dichotomy between literature and reality, between what we live and what we feel or imagine or desire, as the answer lies in the fusion of the two, Zoe (2007), in turning the house of fiction into the most secure reality, Vila-Matas (1996: 193). But this does not involve accepting all of postmodernism's features, since accepting hermeneutic truth makes it possible to propose an aesthetic and even moral ideal, and affirm the existence of a truth and some values that go beyond absolute postmodern relativism that cannot postulate something beyond the perspective of each individual. This truth, however, can no longer just be truth as correspondence as this is too closely linked to traditional realism and common sense. It is instead in the hermeneutic truth analysed here, the truth understood as each individual's participation based on personal experience in the process of establishing the sense or meaning of the reality in which we all find ourselves. As Vila-Matas himself notes:

(...) our minds are more connected than it seems: in reality we comprise a Whole. What I am telling you here is not literature, but an impression I had in that moment of youth that for me counts as another experience that I think it is much better not to forget. (...)

Everything I have written recently is true or tries desperately to approach the truth. I do not like lying at all. This does not erase the fact that — youthful transgressions — I sometimes went too far with certain literary games. But nowadays these games, if I still play them at all, are more refined. Nowadays I only write because I think it can bring me closer to the truth, however much this truth might turn out just to be mine. Just mine? In this way of thinking — I am referring to the mental communication between all humans — it will eventually be the (relative) truth of all of them. Vila-Matas (2013)

It would be hard to find a passage where Vila-Matas is more explicit about the intentions of his work; he writes to approach the truth, to propose a truth in which other human beings can come to participate. This is possible because those human beings participate in "a Whole", they have an intrinsic communication that makes them simultaneously form part of a process in which each one of them develops according to their own specific character.

Without ceasing to be postmodern, Vila-Matas goes a step further, as communication between all human beings who form part of a group is precisely what makes it possible to propose a poetics and a morality, certain considerations or ideals regarding reality that transcend the unavoidable and accepted individualistic postmodernist perspective. The author relates to reality through literary writing. He creates his subjectivity or personal identity, he understands himself, but he also in his own way participates in the truth, in the collective process of creating the framework or general context within which other individuals can also create themselves. However, Vila-Matas suggests that the author should do all of this by being playful and by mixing what he has received with what he is, in an intertextual game, without abandoning beauty or fine poetry, creatively projecting himself onwards like a clock moving forwards, concerning himself more with aspiration than data, with style more than plot, and, finally, maintaining a moral exigency or a demand for authenticity when faced with a reality that tends to annul him in its various processes of consumption and power.

The act of writing then becomes an act of mixing all sorts of situations and representations, biography and the imagined, in which the author creates his own literary identity. Writing is what allows the author to enter this intermediate space between the real and the imaginary which we call utopia, where it is possible to understand the

meaning of existence and reality itself by expanding the boundaries of the human. This space is also one that the author offers to his readers for them to use as they see fit, and therefore it is true, because it is experienced and can to a certain point be shared, but it is a space for which the author pays the price of definitive alienation and the impossibility of coping with the everyday world. Consequently, literature is simultaneously the poison and the medicine, the illness and its cure (Pozuelo Yvancos, 2010: 140) as it enables the reader to understand life, albeit at the cost of being outside it, as recognised by the protagonist of *El mal de Montano*, one of the representations of the author:

Therefore, I can now calmly say that, between life and books, I would choose books as they help me understand life. Literature has always helped me understand life. But for that very reason it leaves me outside it. I am serious; it is fine this way, Vila-Matas (2002).

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Can Using a Discussion-board Enhance Writing Practice for EAP/ESL Students?

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Abstract—This paper presents a case study from English for Academic Purpose II ESL class at a small public university in southwest Oklahoma, USA. The study explores the usefulness of using computer-assisted technology such as a discussion-board to improve ESL teaching and learning. The study set up two hypotheses: 1) Using a discussion board as a course platform can enhance reading and writing practice for EAP students, and 2) using a discussion board as a course platform can help EAP students receive more feedback for improving their reading and writing. To test the hypotheses, the researchers collected and analyzed the students' original and revised reading reflections and peer responses to the reflections. They also held a focus group interview among the participants to understand the students' perceptions on their reading and writing practice on the discussion board. The findings support both hypotheses. The findings show that due to some technological features of a discussion board, the EAP students obtained more additional writing opportunities than they would in a traditional classroom setting and were able to write, receive feedback, and revise more frequently and effectively. The findings also indicate that writing reading reflections and peer reviews on a discussion board motivated the EAP students to write more carefully and thoughtfully and helped them gain a sense of learning community outside the classroom.

Index Terms—EAP/ESL students, a discussion board, educational technology, ESL reading and writing

I. INTRODUCTION

Second language teaching professionals and researchers have noticed that, as the information and communication technologies advance, their various educational functions for promoting language teaching and learning are being explored and experimented on in many ESL (English as a Second language) and EFL (English as a Foreign language) classrooms. The recent research in using computer-assisted language learning technology such as blogs and Wikis for ESL and EFL teaching has revealed some promising outcomes. For example, Hashemi & Najafi (2011) have found that using weblogs for their Iranian EFL class not only helped the students improve their writing skills through writing more outside the class and interacting with their peers but also enabled the teachers to provide some collective targeted feedbacks for the students' writing problems. In another study, Nakamaru (2012) created a semester-long class wiki for her remedial ESL students to help them improve their English. Her study reported that the repeated out-of-class engagement through the wiki over the course of the semester led to successful outcomes (Nakamaru, 2012). However, there has been very little research done on how using a discussion board on Blackboard as a course platform can promote ESL or EFL teaching and learning.

A discussion board is an asynchronous online communication tool that allows an individual to post a comment, a reflection, or questions. Then, the other members of the same discussion board may read these postings, and respond. The Blackboard Discussion Board tool works in a similar way. It contains an interface that is composed of folders containing users' posted messages on a particular topic, threads made up of a series of responses about the same topic, and each group member's contribution to that topic. These "forums" also have many settings that control who can post and what other types of actions users can take such as editing and reposting their own threads or rating others' posts. But, one major difference of using a discussion board from other online communication tools (such as blogs) is that the discussion board is more under the control of the instructor in terms of writing topics, writing frequency, and revisions.

In order to explore the usefulness of the discussion board on Blackboard as a course platform for language teaching and learning, this paper, based on a case study for an EAP II (English for Academic Purpose) ESL class in a southwest public university in Oklahoma, USA, makes two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Using the discussion board on Blackboard as a course platform can enhance reading and writing practice for EAP students and thus help improve their writing.

Hypothesis 2: Using the discussion board on Blackboard as a course platform can help EAP students receive more feedback for revising their writing.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. *Second Language Acquisition Theories*

Stephen Krashen (1981) in his Input Hypothesis claims that “an important ‘condition for language acquisition to occur is that the acquirer understands (via hearing or reading) input language that contains structure ‘a bit beyond’ his or her current level of competence... If an acquirer is at stage or level i , the input he or she understands should contain $i+1$ ” (p. 100). Many L2 educators believe that Krashen, in fact, advocates that language acquisition occurs through maximum exposure to comprehensible input in the target language. Swain (1985, 2005), on the other hand, in her Output Hypothesis, emphasizes the output, the production of the language, as a significant way to test hypotheses about the target language. She maintains that “Its role [output] is, at the minimum, to provide opportunities for contextualized, meaningful use to test out hypotheses of the target language, and to move the learner from a purely semantic analysis of language to a syntactic analysis of it” (1985, p.252). Additionally, Krashen’s (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis suggests that lowering learner stress and anxiety can improve learning conditions and make learning more fun and engaging for ESL students.

B. *ESL Communicative Interaction Theories and Social Constructivism*

Richard-Amato (2010) notes that Long’s (1981; 1996) Interactional Hypothesis “argues that environmental contributions to the acquisition process are mediated by selective attention and the learners’ processing capacity in the new language” (p. 43). Gass & Mackey (2006), based on Long’s Interactional Hypothesis, state that the “interaction approach considers exposure to language, production of language, and feedback on production as constructs that are important for understanding how second language learning takes place” (p. 3). Indeed, the social constructivism represented by cultural-historical activity theory also maintains that knowledge is constructed through social interaction such as conversation, discussion, and negotiation process (as cited in Kuo, Belland, & Kuo, 2017). Vygotsky (1978) also claims that learning happens through meaning making that involves the process of sharing various perspectives and experiences in communities of practice.

C. *The Rationales on Writing Reading Reflections*

Smith (2010) and Atwell (1987) claim that students learn to read by reading and learn to write by writing while Zamel (1992) and Spack (1985) argue that, when ESL learners are given opportunities to connect their reading and writing activities, their language learning will be enhanced. Additionally, Lee (2015) also sees the connection between the reading and writing and states that “[among] the various reading and writing activities, keeping a reading response journal has long been viewed as a vital tool to engage students in both learning activities” (p.111). In fact, the literature on writing reading reflections summarizes three advantages: 1) helping students gain the meaning from the reading (Hurst 1999 & Rossing, 2009), 2) making students use writing to clarify, organize, and express thoughts from their reading (Cohen, 2007), and 3) providing an opportunity for students to find effective reading and writing strategies and communicate with peers (Leki, 2001).

The insights drawn from these theories for this study is that doing more reading (receiving comprehensive input) and writing (producing language output) in the second language with constant teacher and peer feedback (involving social interactions) will provide more English language learning opportunities and interactive communication for the EAP and ESL students. Informational technology, however, as a medium for communicative interaction, can help expand these opportunities for ESL learners’ genuine and meaningful communication in the target language (McClanahan, 2014). Applying technology such as the discussion board into ESL classrooms should promote the second language acquisition/learning in all the four language skills, especially in reading and writing.

III. METHOD

A. *Participants*

This paper presents a case study that lasted 8 weeks. Five ESL students taking English for Academic Purposes II (English 0413) in the spring 2014 semester at a small public university in Oklahoma, USA participated in the study. Those students were from five different countries: Paraguay, Spain, Germany, South Korea, and Mongolia.

B. *Research Settings*

At the university, EAP II was a remedial writing class designed for ESL students as a transition/prerequisite class to the university freshman composition class (English 1113). The EAP II class met 75 minutes twice a week. The course objectives of the EAP II (created by one of the researchers, the instructor of EAP II) mainly focused on:

- 1) Writing: Students will be able to construct clear thesis statements; to understand essay development and structures, to write unified, coherent essay focused on different patterns of development; and to write five- paragraph essays,
- 2) Reading: Students will be able to understand main idea, analyze supporting ideas, and summarize the main ideas, and
- 3) Grammar and Mechanics: Students will be able to refine knowledge and skills of using correct words, sentence structures, and punctuation.

To fulfill the course objectives, two textbooks were used to facilitate the learning: One was focused on reading, and the other was on writing.

At the beginning of the semester, through assessing the student diagnostic writing and giving individual conferences with the students, the researchers identified some special academic needs of these students in this class:

- a. To have more reading and writing practice to enrich their writing invention experiences, understand usages of English grammar, and express themselves fluently and correctly,
- b. To receive more feedback from their instructor and peers for improving their reading and writing,
- c. To revise more to understand the nature of their errors in their writing.

C. Procedures

During the beginning of the spring semester in 2014, the students were assigned one of the major assignments of the course: Reading Reflection Postings to the Discussion Board on the course website- Blackboard. The reading reflections were based on the reading chapters in their textbook *Cover to Cover 3: Reading Comprehension and Fluency*. The assignment asked them not only to post their reflections but also to revise and repost each reflection based on the individual written feedback from the instructor and their peers. Additionally, they were also required to post their peer responses on the Discussion Board for their classmates' original postings.

At the end of the semester, a focus group interview (see Appendix 1) was given to all the participants by the instructor (one of the researchers) to understand their opinions about their writing practice on the Discussion Board.

D. Data Collection

Two types of data were collected:

- a. the students' original reading reflections, revised reading reflections, and peer response postings on the Discussion Board, which aimed to see the frequency of the writing and its effect on writing;
- b. the results of the focus group interview, which aimed to understand students' perceptions of the effectiveness of writing the Discussion Board.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section will present the findings of and discussion on the study in response to the two hypotheses presented in the beginning and will discuss the significance of the findings.

Hypothesis 1: Using discussion board as a course platform can enhance reading and writing practice for EAP student and thus help improve their writing.

The findings about the postings on the discussion board showed that, throughout the eight weeks of the semester, the participants had written 4 original reading reflections and 4 revised reading reflections (based on the instructor's and the peers' feedback) on the discussion board. There were 25 peer responses (some students responded to more than one classmate's reflection in each posting). When we compared these results with the previous semester (Fall 2013 where we did not use a discussion board), the writing reading reflection postings in this study could be seen as "extra writing practice opportunity" the participants had in their target language learning.

One of the major reasons for the students to have this "extra-writing practice opportunity" or to be able to write more frequently via using the discussion board was obviously due to some key technology features of the discussion board. In this class, students could access the discussion board through a course link inside a learning module--Blackboard, a type of educational software and purchased and installed by the university for students and faculty. In fact, they could access the discussion board at any location and any time at their own convenience as long as there was an internet connection. During and after their production of reading reflections, they could also edit and repost the same drafts, and thus it provided students with an additional online learning space to revisit their thinking and writing process easily. As the educators at the University of Arizona note, through discussion boards, "[students] have time to reflect on what [they] want to say before [they] enter [their] responses in the system. They are also able to view the responses and perspectives of all [their] classmates, which is not easily accomplished in a real classroom setting" (Online discussions).

After all, the significance of being able to write more frequently and conveniently via using a discussion board lies in several aspects. According to Swain (1985), using the target language to communicate not only can provide ESL/EFL students opportunities to test out hypotheses of the target language, but also it can move the learners from "a purely semantic analysis of language to a syntactic analysis of it" (p. 252). That is to say, in the EAP students' learning context here, the students would first focus on their reading comprehension on the assigned reading chapters, which involved using and expanding their knowledge of English vocabulary, expressions, and grammar. As a result, they practiced receiving and understanding meaning of language input as what Krashen (1982) claimed in his Input Hypothesis. Then, in order to write the reflection, they needed to shift not only to generate various English sentence patterns with proper vocabulary and grammar but also to demonstrate their understanding on writing paragraphs and essays, thus further practicing using English language through producing output. Therefore, the discussion board here served as a learning space for EAP students to practice reading and writing in English more frequently and helped them to become better writers.

Table 1 compares the sample reading reflections of the students during the eight week period, which shows that the students improved their writing mainly in the areas of clarity of meaning, sentence coherence (through using transitions), and correct grammatical usage.

TABLE 1
COMPARISON OF SAMPLES OF EAPI STUDENT READING REFLECTIONS

The Selected Student Reading Reflections	The Original Reflections	The Revised Reflections (based on the feedback from the instructor and the peer responses and the revised parts were underlined)
Reflection 1 (Student 1)	<p>“In this lecture I could notice many things that I did not know about the stress; like a is not only a but thing. I realize now that the stress is similar that a warning, that our body makes on purpose, so this is very useful for us. There stress likely is manageable, it means that you can have control of the stress, but you can eliminate. There are strategies that you can use to control the stress or reduce the intensity of it; this strategies are for instance: take waks, relaxion techniques, do yoga. Everybody knows which technique is better for his own body you can choose many. In my case I try to talk with my friends, take a long walk without cell phone, I do not want to know what time is it, I only want to walk alone. Finally I can say that the stress is a big tool for our bodies. It is impossible to make a lot of things in a certain amount of time, you need to take a rest or make something that help you to out of the routine. For me the best way to interact or reduce the stress is if you are organize and choose priorities for each day, making a process, step by step. At the end I found a very useful alarm warning that help me at all.”</p>	<p>“In this <u>reading</u>, I <u>have</u> noticed many things that I did not know about the stress; <u>for example, it is not just a bad thing. I’ve realized now</u> that the stress is similar <u>to a</u> warning that our body makes <u>to us</u> on purpose, so this is very useful for us. The stress <u>luckily</u> is manageable, <u>and</u> it means that you can have control of the stress, but you <u>cannot</u> eliminate it. There are strategies that you can use to control the stress or reduce the intensity <u>of it</u>; these strategies are for instance: <u>taking walks, learning</u> relaxing techniques, and <u>doing</u> yoga. Everybody knows which technique is better for his <u>or her</u> own body; you can choose many. In my case, I try to talk with my friends, and take a long walk without cell phone. I do not want to know what time it is, <u>and</u> I only want to walk alone. Finally, I can say that the stress is a big <u>signal our body gives to us</u>. It is <u>impossible</u> to make a lot of things in a certain amount of time, <u>so</u> you need to take a rest or <u>do</u> something that helps you to be out of the routine. For me, the best way to interact with or reduce the stress is <u>that I try to</u> organize myself and choose priorities for each day, making a plan, and <u>doing</u> things step by step. <u>In the end</u>, I found a very useful alarm warning, <u>so the stress also helps me a lot.</u>”</p>
Reflection 2 (Student 2)	<p>“There are several reasons to why teenagers are easily to get obesity. One cause is stress among teenagers. Now days, teenagers get lots of stresses from many things. It could be from their school grade, friendship, or etc. If human gets too much stresses then the brain stimulate some nerves and that make people to eat a lot. Second, fast foods could be another reason. We can so easily find McDonald, Burger King, Taco Bell, or etc. in everywhere, and those foods are very high calorie, which means easy to get obesity than other foods. Lastly, technology may causes of obesity. On the earth now we have very high technology, and many people have at least one of their own smartphone or game devices, for examples, X-Box, Wii, and Nintendo. Instead, people do exercise, they always stick with their game devices, and it causes people not move, exercise, and less spending energy.”</p>	<p>“There are several <u>reasons for</u> why teenagers are easily to get obesity. One cause is stress among teenagers. Nowadays, teenagers get lots of stresses from many things. It could be from their school grade, friendship, or etc. If human gets too much stresses then the brain <u>stimulates</u> some nerves and that <u>makes</u> people to eat a lot, <u>thus making a person put on weight</u>. Second, fast foods could be another reason. We can so easily find McDonald, Burger King, Taco Bell, or etc. everywhere, and those foods are in very high calorie, which means <u>it is easy for people</u> to get obesity than other foods. Lastly, technology <u>may cause obesity</u>. <u>In the world now</u>, we have very high technology, and many people have at least one of their own smart phone or game devices, for examples, X-Box, Wii, and Nintendo. <u>Instead of doing exercise, people always stick with</u> their game devices, and it causes people <u>not to</u> move, <u>exercise, and spend less</u> energy. <u>So these are the reasons why teenagers get obesity easily.</u>”</p>
Reflection 3 (Student 3)	<p>“The Day of the Dead (dia de los muertos) is a celebration that is celebrated thru most Latin countries. In Mexico it is celebrated around the 1st and 2nd day of November. It is a national holyday in my country; traditionally we remember those that had died in our families or friends. The celebration includes walking from our homes to the cemetery where our loved ones are buried. Another traditional thing we do is we prepared the person/s favorite meal to take as tribute to them, we often sees death as just a cycle of life. The festival also includes customary deserts and other foods and artifacts. They make a special kind of bread dubbed bread of the dead(pan de muertos) and also they make skull candies made with sugar cane. Although it is a tragedy to lose our friends and family we take a special day to remember them in life, when we go to the cemetery we sit down clean their tombstones and we even eat a meal in the cemetery. The reason why this festival is so interesting is because in that day we truly are connected to our loved ones even though they have passed on.”</p>	<p>“The Day of the Dead (dia de los muertos) is a celebration that is celebrated through most Latin countries. In Mexico, it is celebrated around the 1st and 2nd day of November. It is a national holyday in my country; traditionally we remember those that had died in our families or friends <u>who passed away</u>. The celebration includes walking from our homes to the cemetery where our loved ones are buried. Another traditional thing we do is <u>that</u> we prepared the person/s favorite meal to take as tribute to them we often see death as just a cycle of life. The festival also includes customary deserts and other foods and artifacts. <u>People</u> make a special kind of bread dubbed <u>bread of the dead (pan de muertos)</u>, and also they make skull candies made with sugar cane. Although it is a tragedy to lose our friends and family, we take a special day to remember them in life. <u>When</u> we go to the <u>cemetery</u>, we sit down <u>and</u> clean their tombstones, and we even eat a meal in the cemetery. The reason why this festival is so <u>important</u> is because <u>on</u> that day we truly are connected to our loved ones even though they have <u>passed away</u>.”</p>

The focus group interviews also revealed that the students reported spending more out-of-class time on reading and writing because of the discussion board postings. One student said that 'I edited my grammar more carefully with my reflections because I didn't want my classmates to be confused with my writing.' Another student mentioned that 'since we all responded to the same readings on discussion board, I tried to read each of the reading several times before I started to write so that I could say something interesting and special about the article.' This finding of students' giving more time to reading and grammar seems to concur with Lee's (2012) idea on the reading response e-journal. Her research shows that using the reading response e-journal serves as an alternative way to engage low-achieving EFL students because the reading response offered students a means of articulating, exploring, and expanding their understanding on the reading (Lee, 2012). Furthermore, Lee's study concludes that "[w]hen journal writing becomes a consistent part of students' learning, it motivates them to write more in length and richer in context" (2012, p.113). Similarly, the students in this study seemed to become motivated and interested in doing the reading reflections during this eight-week period; thus, they put more effort into this learning experience.

We can say that the findings so far support "Hypothesis 1: Using discussion board as a course platform can enhance reading and writing practice for EAP students and thus to help improve their writing."

Now, we will report and discuss the findings for second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Using discussion board as a course platform can help EAP students receive more feedback for revising their writing.

This second hypothesis was also supported by both findings on the frequency of postings and on the focus group interview. Each student received a total of 4 feedback responses for his or her four original reading reflections from the instructor and at least 20 written feedbacks from his or her peers for the same four original reflections throughout the eight weeks. Based on all the feedbacks, each participant revised each reflection and then repost it to the discussion board to be re-graded by the instructor and re-read by the peers.

Thus, it is obvious that the students received more feedbacks for their original postings than they would be if they simply had the reading reflections for in-class workshops as they did for the other three major essays. In a workshop, due to the time limit, each student usually only had enough time to peer review one classmate's essay, so each student could only get one peer feedback. In contrast, on the discussion board, since there was no time and location restriction, it was much more efficient and convenient for each student to read other peers' postings and respond to them.

The importance of peer responses for ESL students has been emphasized by many scholars. Mittan (1989) states that peer feedback is a way of giving control to students since it allows them to make active decisions about whether or not to use their peers' comments as opposed to a passive reliance on teachers' feedback. Moreover, since student reviewers may perceive that their peers might experience the similar difficulties in writing as they do, peer feedback may actually help to reduce writer anxiety and increase writer confidence (Chaudron, 1984). More importantly, peer feedback can benefit both the reviewers and the writers by helping them to have a specific audience (their classmates) in their minds (Hyland, 2014); thus, their feedback might be more easily understood and applied to the revisions. So, with the increased peer response practice due to using the discussion board, the EAP students also have benefited from the advantages peer responses can offer.

In fact, the focus group interview showed that the students held very positive attitudes towards the roles of the peer feedback played in revising their reading reflections. For example, one student said, 'I like to read my classmates' comments because I can feel that they are honest with me and truly want to help me.' Another student claimed that 'one thing I enjoyed using my peers' feedback is that they made me excited about what I did well even though sometimes I was a bit upset with their corrections on my errors.' Still, some students remarked that one thing that really benefited them was the process of writing the peer responses itself because they believed that it helped them become both a more careful reader and writer. As one of them explained, 'You know if you want to give others some good suggestions, you really need to understand what they are saying and help them find out their mistakes. So, I often spent a lot of time to write my peer responses and to show I am serious about my classmates' writing and want to share my opinions with them.'

In the following, Table 2 displays some samples of student peer responses, which demonstrates how the students tried to help each other in the aspects of encouragement, appreciation of others' cultures, and constructive critiques.

TABLE 2
SAMPLE EAP STUDENT PEER RESPONSES

The Summary of the Themes of the Peer Responses	Sample Student Peer Responses (1)	Sample Student Peer Responses (2)
<i>Encouragement for each other</i>	"It was easy to understand for me because of your outline. I am totally agreed with your first cause of teenager's obesity. First, I did not think about teenager's parent's influence, but after you guys opinion I realize it can be most reason for teenager's obesity especially for Americans because they love to eat fast foods and frozen foods." (Student 3)	"I think it is really interesting what you are saying about how role models can give hope to the other people. I have the same opinion than you about this topic, people should help each other to make a better world" (Student 2).
<i>Appreciation of each other's cultures</i>	"I have notice that in your country, your people celebrated also that. In my country is the same thing. It is true that this is a custom most commonly in the latin american countries. However there are differences in how we celebrated in my country. I noticed that in your country this is an very important day, even you has a holiday for that. In Paraguay there are only a few of persons that celebrated the day of deads, and it is only in the small cities and little towns. This is because in my country those places are the places that until now have a lot of custom and beliefs. I liked see that in latin america we have a few celebrations in common. Finally I want to say that I liked how your people has until now that tradicions also how they celebrated this day" (Student 1).	"It is intereting that you give examples that how male beauty works in Korea. Also it is a really helpful information to let people know that how male beauty becomes a trend in different countries. I totally agree with you, because in Mongolia, most of guys started to care about themselves, which is a good thing. For me, good looking men are always seem to be more confident with themselves" (Student 3).
<i>Constructive Critique</i>	"I did not see anything about your opinion. Reflection should base on your opinion or your thought after read story or something. I think you just summarized what was story about so I hope just add some your opinion and your own experiences as an example so we can understand what you felt after read this passage" (Student 4).	"I like the sound of that festival. It sounds like it involves a lot of activities. It is great that they keep that tradition alive, it is important to remember our history so that we not repeat the mistakes from the past. Is there a fun story about the festival that you would like to share with me? I would love to listen to it. I also would like to tell you that please watch out for run-on sentences. They are confusing to me. I know I also make errors on it" (Student 5).

These findings from the focus group interview and sample peer responses in Table 2 seem to echo Cuhadar's & Kuzu's (2010) research finding: using technological tools such as blogs in constructivist learning environments can provide learners the means to cooperate and interact with peers from different cultures, seek and share information, and solve problems and make decisions (as cited in Kuo, Belland, & Kuo, 2017). The findings also indicate that using the discussion board had helped the EAP students attain a sense of learning community outside the classroom. According to McMillan & Chavis (1986), when group members feel that other members matter to one another and to the group and when group members' goals and needs can be met through their commitment to be interactive with and responsible for one another, the sense of community or belongingness among the members is established. This sense of learning community seems to have formed among the EAP students. With this creation of a learning community for the EAP students in mind, we can better understand how and why the EAP students appeared more engaged in peer reviews and responses on the discussion board.

V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This eight-week case study on using a discussion board to enhance the EAP students' reading and writing practice turned out to be rewarding for both ESL teaching and learning. Taking advantage of the discussion board, we were able to expand the exposure of the target language to the EAP students and thus help them receive more comprehensive input (Krashen, 1982) from reading chapters, from instructor feedback, and from peer feedback. Additionally, using the discussion board as a teaching and learning tool, we were also able to engage students in doing more productive interaction with the target language and with the peers through frequently writing, revising, and reviewing others' work. We suggest that the students not only have more practice in receiving language input but also on generating language output (Swain, 1985). Still, using the discussion board as a teaching tool enabled us to scaffold the students' learning by allowing us to post some specific instructions for the students on how to approach different reading reflection assignments (see Appendix 2). Finally, the study also shows that the students subconsciously established a learning community within themselves outside their classroom through meaningful interacting with one another on the discussion board, in which they cared about each other, helped each other, and encouraged each other.

Despite these positive findings, we noticed that the public nature of writing on the discussion board may cause some unexpected anxiety among some EAP students. For instance, two students admitted that writing reading reflections on discussion board sometimes made them a bit upset because they worried about they might lose face or appear silly if they made many errors in their writing. This awareness of their limited English proficiency, however, may work as a double edge sword. On one hand, it would make the students feel pressured and ultimately treat writing on the discussion board as a burden. On the other hand, to consider saving face, the students would also work very hard to improve their English and do a good job. The similar situation also occurred in other studies. Lin, Groom, & Lin (2013)

in their article, "Blog-assisted learning in the ESL writing classroom: A phenomenological analysis," claim that "[t]he students' awareness of a large and potential critical audience for their work and their anxiety about grammatical mistakes did not affect the amount of effort they put into their writing, however" (p. 134). The implication from this kind of phenomenon would be that ESL instructors need to realize that using teaching strategies to help lower ESL learner stress and anxiety in an online learning environment due to its exposure to public can be more urgent and challenging than those in a traditional classroom.

APPENDIX 1. FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do you like the writing reading reflections on discussion board?
2. What do you see as the advantages of posting your reading reflections on discussion board?
3. What are the things you like about writing peer responses on discussion board?
4. What are the things you dislike about writing peer responses on discussion board?
5. In what ways, do you think that writing and revising reading reflections and writing peer responses have helped improve your writing?

APPENDIX 2. THE INSTRUCTOR'S SAMPLE INSTRUCTIONS FOR WRITING READING REFLECTIONS

Instruction: In this reading reflection 1, please write one **well-structured paragraph** of about 350 words on "Male Beauty" or on "Changing Faces." Make sure that you will establish a **clear topic sentence** (which tells the main idea of your paragraph) and support it with adequate detailed explanations and examples. In your paragraph, please also try to use various sentence types (such as simple sentences, compound sentences, and complex sentences) to make your paragraph more effective and interesting.

Instruction: In this reading reflection 3, please write a short essay that will

- first write an introduction to provide background information and introduce your thesis statement,
- then, summarize the article "A Role Model Makes a Difference" from Cover to Cover 3 Unite 6, Part 2,
- next, reflect on the article (discussing what you think of the ideas in the article or what you've learned from the article), and
- finally, write a concluding paragraph for your essay.

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Optimal Phonology: The Very Idea

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Abstract—The epistemology, theoretical constructs and production mechanism in optimality-theoretic approaches to phonology are examined and critiqued in terms of the phenomenology of speech sounds. An understanding has been arrived at that phonological optimality is construed too narrowly. A linguistic form is optimal in that it invokes in the hearer the meaning intended by the speaker. Its occurrences in different usage events form a cloud, in which phonological abstractions take place. Phonology is thus an inventory of both concrete and abstract exemplars, with the latter immanent in the former. Due to its emphasis on constructions, Cognitive Grammar provides the means for the flesh-out of a comprehensive model for optimality-theoretical approach to phonology.

Index Terms—phonology, optimality, OT, exemplar theory, cognitive grammar

I. INTRODUCTION

Anything in this world is subject to competing forces of various kinds, whether in its past, present, or future. The way of its being can be nothing if not fit for its survival. The concept “optimality”, fitness or suitability of the one elected from many, therefore, captures the very essence of its phenomenology. An investigation of it in terms of optimality, the balancing of competing forces acting upon it, is consequently a very promising line of pursuit.

An object of scientific interest is the result of a long process of adaptation and selection, which usually spans over generations or even millennia. Those who wonder at and speculate about it are the human observers, who, because of the transient nature of their lives, have no chances to witness the whole process of its becoming. For its explication and prediction, one can only resort to model-building to simulate the path of its evolution. To the effect that a model induces a result that is isomorphic with the object in question, it is considered to be a successful one: it explains the object or phenomenon and is capable of making predictions about its future development.

Model-building, however, is ridden with the investigator’s epistemological bent. The kind of ontological status he attributes to a phenomenon under investigation is of paramount importance for the efficacy of a model. Due to the complex nature of most phenomena and the intricacy needed for its exposition, the ideology behind a model can easily fall out of the purview of a novice or even a professional sometimes. The result is usually a blind adherence to a biased model and its unjustified propagation, which in turn does more bad than good to healthy theory developments.

Optimality, due to its aforementioned potentials for explanation and prediction, has been introduced into the study of phonology by Prince & Smolensky (1993) in the early 1990s. The ensuing years is a dramatic period in which their approach has conquered and expanded. Few people have questioned the nature of the phonology as envisaged by their optimality-theoretic model. In view of the criticisms it has received from evolutionary phonology (Blevins, 1997) and its general apathy to the symbol grounding problem (Harnad, 1990), we deem it necessary to reexamine some of the key constructs in this model to put phonology and phonological optimality into a broader perspective.

II. METHODOLOGY

This is an argumentative thesis aiming to pave the road for a cognitive approach to phonology. Since its major concern is how speech sounds achieve “optimality” for effective verbal communication, the theoretical constructs in extant optimality-theoretic models have to be scrutinized for their validity and the oversights of critical aspects involved in linguistic behaviors in these models have to be pinpointed before a new proposal can be made. Our method is then one of presentations and critiques.

The key concepts and ideas in three models, classic Optimality Theory (OT) (Prince et al, 1993; Kager, 1999), functional OT (Boersma, 1999), and the Combined Model (van de Weijer, 2012), will be presented, analyzed and commented first. Relevant constructs and ideas from Cognitive Grammar (Langacker, 1987) are then borrowed for a tentative analysis of the forms for the past tense in English in terms of optimality.

III. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A. *The Phenomenon of Speech Sounds*

Language arises from and then serves for human interactions. Phonology is concerned with the description of how speech sounds are organized for that purpose. Any phonological model should then take the following basic facts of speech sounds seriously and try to incorporate them into it.

First, speech sounds are reference points (Rosch, 1975) of meaning. As the means to guide the hearer to what a

speaker intends, they have to be successfully parsed and interpreted by the hearer. This means that there must be pre-established form-meaning pairings in their minds for their references. A common mental representation of the association between a natural sound or kinetic melody (Sheets-Johnstone, 2003) and an entity, like the crying of a cuckoo bird, or that of the patting sound and the patting action, is clearly needed for the speech sounds “cuckoo” or “pat” to be initiated as a reference point. Let us call form-meaning associations at this level primary inter-subjectivity (Trevarthen et al, 2001).

For there to be utterance-meaning pairings, the members in a speech community have to interact. To say the human mind is hard-wired with a phonological system is relegating the very responsibility a researcher should undertake to God, let alone the circularity it incurs. If language is understood to have started by piecemeal, namely, from its proto-form to the fully-fledged one, the phonological system, along with its semantics, is necessarily emergent in nature (Beckner et al, 2009). The imitations of the crying sound of a cuckoo bird is sometimes for the hearer to look, sometimes for him or her to catch. Different orienting actions have different utterances, viz., different speech sounds. Sound-meaning associations at this level could be called secondary inter-subjectivity (Carpenter et al., 1998). The word “cuckoo” is an abstraction from these different usage events, hence emergent.

A third aspect of speech sounds is that they are produced by human mouths. This is a truism. But in what way is phonology related to the human mouth? There is a rather long tradition to disassociate phonetics, the study of speech sounds, from phonology, the patterning of them. Phonological analysis is carried out in terms of abstractions like features, phonemes, syllables etc. Scant attention has been given to the fact that all these constructs are meaningful only in reference to speech sounds, rather than alphabetic writing, which is only an approximation of speech. Real-time speech sounds are produced by physical movements in the mouth space along the time dimension. Spatial and temporal factors are part and parcel of speech sounds. Both phonetics and phonology shall not fail to see this.

Ideally, all the above factors should be taken into account to make any optimality-theoretic approach reasonable and compelling. In the following paragraphs, classic OT in phonology and its offshoots will be examined in terms of them.

B. Classic (OT)

The following quote is a succinct summary of classic OT (Mohan et al, 2010, p. 143-144):

Both (OT and Generative Grammar) theories share the assumption that Universal Grammar (UG) provides an inventory of universal distinctive features; OT also assumes that UG provides an inventory of universal constraints. The feature inventory defines the set of potential input segments in human languages that serve as phonemic, i.e., contrastive segments across languages, while the combination of feature inventory and constraints define the set of cross-linguistically possible sets of (i) phonetic segments, (ii) sequences of phonetic segments, and (iii) pairings of phonemic-phonetic segments/segment sequences. The features and constraints provided in UG are available to all individual grammars, hence it follows that all individual grammars contain the same set of distinctive features and constraints. Individual grammars vary in their interactions between constraints, formally expressed as ranking. Structural differences between individual grammars are due solely to differences in ranking. Constraints hold on phonetic representations (output constraints, i.e. markedness constraints), as well as on the pairing between phonemic and phonetic representations (input-output constraints, i.e. faithfulness constraints). There are no constraints on phonemic representations (Richness of the Base). Thus, all individual grammars have the same set of contrastive units (phonemic inventory) and there are no limits on sequences of phonemic segments. However, languages vary in the set of permissible phonetic segments and in the permissible sequencing of those segments. The assumption that UG provides universal inventories of features and constraints allows us to explain phonological patterns that appear recurrently across genetically unrelated languages while the assumption that individual grammars vary in the ranking of universal constraints allows us to explain the typological variations between such recurrent patterns.

Everything seems to be tidy and neat at first blush. Yet at a closer look it is not very difficult to spot unconvincing elements in its argumentation. Let's first examine the role UG plays in this theory. Suppose that there does exist such a thing as UG, which determines the inventories of both features and constraints. But it is just something mysterious and beyond reach. Practitioners still have to go to linguistic generalizations for its availability. The inventories they use to generate output forms are downright abstractions from linguistic data and have no relation whatsoever with UG. It then follows that the positing of UG is superfluous. It has no practical use for researchers.

Theoretically, however, UG is a powerful tool to make this theory a theory: it gives their feature and constraint inventories an absolute status to qualify them as a fiat that dictates its phonological modeling as if the phonological system is fully autonomous and allow not even the smallest bit of the penetration of human cognition. Could this arbitrary powerful tool be too powerful?

OT stipulates that input should be determined by the universal feature inventory. This amounts to saying that for any linguistic utterance, there are an infinite number of possible phonemic inputs, hence the Richness of the Base hypothesis. Is this compatible with the reality of speech sounds mentioned above? Both intuition and observation tell us that language works in terms of chunks like syllables or multi-syllables that are motivated by specific things or events in specific situations. It is true that they have to abide by the constraints exerted by the anatomy of the human mouth to include some phonological features, but the situated nature of an utterance makes it evident that not just any feature(s) goes. The sounds /koku:/ of “cuckoo” and /pæt/ of “pat” are clearly motivated by natural sounds and speech sounds other than those in the slashes are less likely candidates for them. Phonemic inputs can never run as wild as the

Richness of the Base hypothesis suggests. The hypothesis of features as the sole determining factor of input is in this sense seriously flawed.

The claim that the set of phonemic segments is constraint-free is also not without its problems. Every phonemic segment in this set is said to have two values: unmarked and marked. Markedness serves the purpose of making distinctions. A natural corollary of this presumption is that markedness is an outcome of the functional pressure for making distinctions. That is to say, before markedness becomes universal, the input inventory has already gone through an optimizing process. It follows that markedness could have never been free of constraints. In this consideration, the feature inventory is redundant for this model as it is not what brings about markedness constraints.

Then what are the factors that have led to markedness? Given the discussion of the phenomenology of speech sounds in section II, a reasonable speculation will be that distinctive features are not the primitive force for inputs. An utterance, be it a syllable or a multi-syllable, can become the first word without having to be distinctive: there are simply no other words to be distinct from. Even when there are quite a number of words, they can still be different without resorting to binary features. The chances that a distinctive feature is invoked to distinguish meaning could only be found in minimal pairs or sets. But these occasions on which marked forms are purposefully exploited to distinguish meanings are rather rare if the whole vocabulary of a language is taken into account.

In light of the above reasoning, one wonders whether the concept “markedness” is a valid construct for phonological study at all, as it is useful only spasmodically. For phonemic segments, it is meaningful only when there are phonemic segments like, /□//△/, /◆//◇/, /♣//♠/, /♣//♠/, /♣//♠/ or /♣//♠/ that are different by only one feature and can be paired. The degree of markedness among segments in cross relationship is very difficult to establish. Admittedly, there are languages, e.g. English, that make use of such contrastive pairs profusely. However, there are also ones, e.g. Chinese, in which these kinds of distinctions are only marginally exploited. Markedness thus cannot be applied to the relationships of all phonemic segments.

For phonemic sequencing, markedness is chiefly concerned with syllable structure and complexity of onset and coda. Phonemic sequences as input are usually those with elements that are to be assimilated, changed, deleted, filled, or repeated. Most of these inputs are morphologically motivated except for the one in which the last segment is devoiced. As to the latter, there is clearly a phonetic factor involved, namely, the last segment is usually given less force in speech. Again, input is not constraint-free and the so-called markedness are functionally or phonetically motivated. Markedness as a cover term, consequently, can then be dispensed with, too.

If there is any situation in which markedness constraints are of relevance, it is where there is competition between the functional pressure to distinguish meaning and the principle of economy to tackle phonetic difficulties in the articulation of lexical as well as morpho-syntactic forms that they will try to maintain marked forms. But even this can be overridden by frequency of use, which will be shown in later discussions. By restricting constraints strictly within the domain of articulation, classic OT has stripped phonology of the chance to relate itself with two other domains that are also crucial for verbal communication, time and human cognition.

The linear ordering of linguistic communication exposes all segments in it to the regulation of timing. Naturally produced pre-linguistic vocalizations are all streamlined because they are produced with no conscious control. Once they become prototypical linguistic units through consensual interaction (Maturana, 1978), more linguistic items will develop on the basis of them by adding or subtracting a feature, creating minimal pairs. When they are combined to express more complex ideas, say, a proposition, timing will come to play its part. Where there are segments at either side of the lexical boundaries that do not go with each other, the speaker is faced with a choice: either to smooth them up or not, depending on the time allowed for its articulation.

Whatever form, once finding its way into linguistic communication, is registered along with its context by human memory. Memorized chunks constitute a part of the reservoir of inputs for future uses. The forms entered into memory are subject to complicated process of mental operations like paradigmatic associations of ready-made chunks and further syntagmatic divisions of them, the results of which, phonemic segments, lexical substrates, neighborhood relations of lexical items and contextual clues, to name just a few, will all have to bear upon later linguistic productions. If the base is really rich, it should have included all the above factors.

In view of the inadequacy in the Richness of the Base hypothesis and the looseness in the definition of markedness, one cannot help but wondering whether the core of OT, the interaction of markedness and faithfulness constraints, can ever successfully make the predictions as it has been claimed to be able to.

As a summary of the above analysis, Classic OT is faced with at least the following three problems. The first is the logical fallacy in the claim that both the feature and the phonemic inventories are universal and the former determines the latter. It is baffling not only because it allows one universal to determine another, but also because it disassembles the circularity that is inherent in the model as a whole. Different languages in the world use different phonemic inventories. Any phonological theory should account for why and how they have come into being. The account given by classic OT is that they are the result of the competition between markedness and faithfulness constraints. When asked where the constraints are from, its answer is that they are innate. But in truth, they are typological generalizations (Kager, 1999) from existing phonemic inventories, which is what it is supposed to explain from the very beginning.

The second problem concerns the bivalent nature of constraints. As argued above, markedness arises out of functional pressures and presupposes the existence of other linguistic chunks. Because a Markedness constraint is bivalent, it

either works on the input or not. Once it is put to work, a changed form will be the result; if not, the input is considered to be faithful. In this way a ranking of markedness and faithfulness is established. The model then predicts that whenever such an input occurs, it obeys this ranking of constraints. Is this really the case? It is not. For example, an explanation for the concatenations of “going to” and “want to” in English into “gonna” and “wanna” respectively could indeed be contrived in terms of the interactions of markedness and faithful constraints. But at the same time it will rule out the possibility that the former could still appear in formal communications. It allows no variations in hyper- and hypo-corrections, and as a result, leads to wrong predictions.

The co-existence of the original input and its altered form also shows that faithfulness constraints in classic OT is too restrictive. It is true that the phonological system is to some extent autonomous, viz., it has its own rules of organization when pressed by time, which is why some plausible markedness constraints can be derived. But human cognition, especially its memory and categorizing abilities, can organize and manipulate it for pragmatic purposes once it is acquired. Faithfulness can work at another dimension—speakers’ volition.

Lastly, the assumption that speech sounds are conditioned only by markedness and faithfulness constraints has made linguistic communication too static a phenomenon. Time is another dimension on which linguistic communication unfolds itself. It may press the speaker to concatenate linguistic segments when it is limited; while it may allow full substantiation of them when it is ample. The ironing out of markedness or its maintenance, viz, being faithful, is a function of the time allowed for a specific utterance. In the events that phonological changes do take place, e.g. “gonna” and “wanna” as mentioned above, they are likely to become routines and speakers then have two forms of the same input to be faithful to. The ranking of markedness and faithfulness constraints provided by classic OT may be useful for inter-linguistic differentiation of languages, but intra-linguistically it leads to wrong predictions.

C. *Functional OT*

Functional OT is based on the traditional principle that the tension between clarity and ease is the driving force of phonology. That is, constraints originate from speakers’ phonetic knowledge (Donegan et al, 1979). “The source of markedness constraints as components of grammar is this knowledge. The effect phonetic knowledge has on the typology of the world’s sound systems stems from the fact that certain basic conditions governing speech perception and production are necessarily shared by all languages, experienced by all speakers, and implicitly known by all. This shared knowledge leads learners to postulate independently similar constraints. The activity of similar constraints is a source of systematic similarities among grammars and generates a structured phonological typology” (Hayes et al, 2004, p. 1-2).

Such a line of reasoning epitomizes in Boersma and colleagues (1999), where they argue that: 1) the initial state of grammar consists of a generating mechanism for speech sounds with variable degrees of difficulty and a mechanism for the detection and differentiation of them; 2) the phonetic mechanism gradually develop into grammatically meaningful constraints with relative distinctive capabilities; 3) phonetic functions determines the development of the ranking of constraints.

For Boersma, the constraints defined by classic OT are false. Its descriptions for the effects of markedness constraints can be derived from three functional principles: minimization of effort, maximization of recognition and minimization of categorization. Basing on these principles, he successfully derives different obstruent systems (Boersma, 2003).

What he proves is that phonological grammar is not abstract knowledge, but the result of the interaction of the generating mechanism of speech sounds and the mechanism for speech perception. Such a model has provided a much more reasonable account of the emergence of phonological systems without resorting to a hypothesis of innateness that is neither provable nor falsifiable. But it does not explain why and how the obstruent system, or any other ones like the plosive, the labial, etc. should rise at all.

D. *The Combined Model of OT and Exemplary Theory (ET)*

Exemplar theory was first developed as a model of similarity and classification in perception. It is later extended to be a model of perception, production, and the consequences of the perception-production loop over time. Its relevance for the study of phonology is as follows:

The exemplar approach associates with each category of the system a cloud of detailed perceptual memories. The memories are granularized as a function of the acuity of the perceptual system (and possibly as a function of additional factors). Frequency is not overtly encoded in the model. Instead, it is intrinsic to the cognitive representations for the categories. More frequent categories have more exemplars and more highly activated exemplars than less frequent categories (Pierrehumbert, 2001, p. 143).

Out of the concern with problems like phonological opacity, too many solutions in the input system and inability to cope with variation that are inherent in classic OT, and also the observation that all these problems might be accommodated by introducing exemplar theory into an OT framework, van de Weijer (2012) proposes to combine them “in such a way that all strengths will be retained and all weaknesses disappear” (p. 49). The combined model goes as follows:

In the combined theory, there is no infinite set of candidates, like in classical OT. Instead, the candidates are the exemplar tokens as in ET, so they are individual-specific and come with frequency-related information, which is a direct function of the degree of exposure to a particular item. The evaluation metric, i.e. the grammar, picks out one of these,

viz. the candidate that is best suited for use on that particular occasion (taking into account stylistic factors, for instance) (van de Weijer, 2009, p.123).

In this model, the innateness hypothesis is also discarded. Constraints are generalizations across the data to which language learners are exposed. We can see clearly such theoretical position is just the same as is held by functional OT, which is a compelling model for the generation of the phonemic inventory. Since this combined theory shares the same epistemological stand and aims at explaining how inter-word phonology is carried out with exemplary inputs, it is potentially an integral part of functional approach to phonological optimality.

But as a newly proposed model, there is still much to work on. One fundamental issue is what the production mechanism ought to be like. Should we posit a strategy of abstraction in speakers, as a result of which they hypothesize an underlying form on the basis of available tokens? Or should we simply mark a specific token as the underlying form, so that it has a special status among the exemplars and then the phonological grammar could change it into another one if the phonological environment gives occasion to assimilate (van de Weijer, 2009)? Such an issue is directly related to the dubious nature of the organization of exemplar clouds. Though it will take time and effort to come up with a solution, the combined model seems to be on the right track.

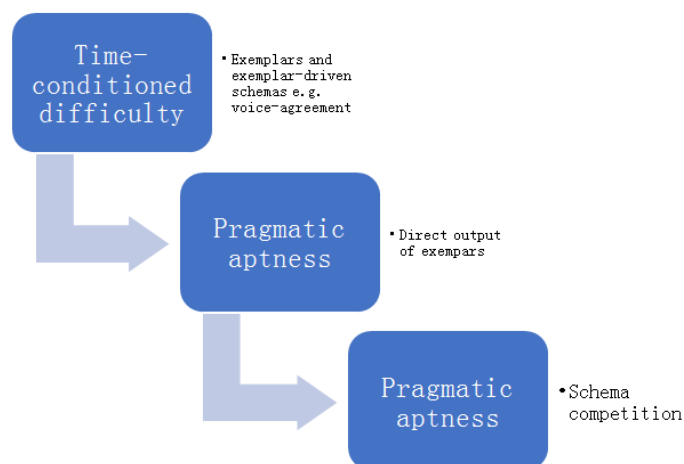
E. Cognitive Grammar

As has been discussed previously, speech production involves articulatory gestures (Browman et al, 1992) produced on the temporal scale, with human cognition as a very attentive manager. What is produced always leaves a trace on the mind. Specific gestures, along with their combinatory values for other gestures, are represented in the forms of motor routines as well as speech sounds in the human mind. The form of a specific sound given rise to by a specific gesture, when juxtaposed with other sounds, will invariably take on slight or dramatic changes, depending on the time allowed for the articulation of the involved gestures. The changed sound relative to the original one is not likely to be reinvented every time because human memory may well have retained it. In such a case, the specific way that has led to the changed sound is also registered, becoming a potential attractor of similar cases. Exemplar clouds formed in this way are thus hereditary.

After long enough time, a cloud tends to stabilize. But with gestures, which are dynamic by nature, pulling the strings behind the scenes, one can never say it is absolutely static. New exemplars will continue to come in. This is why language is forever on the drift. Neither can one say a cloud is chaotic. Every bit of speech sounds in it is a useful construction, so long as the speech flow is meaningfully parsed.

Though an optimality-theoretic framework in phonology that adopts phonological constructions as basic units of analysis is by no means clear at present, it could be argued that, since “the major empirical motivation for Construction Grammar is the need to develop a system of grammatical description in which the marked constructions (more or less ‘idiom-like’ forms of expressions) are represented in the same formal system as the regular, ‘core’ patterns or rules” (Kay, 2002, p.1), and both the functional model by Boersa and the combined model by van de Weijer are pointing to a functional approach to phonological optimality, such a model is in no way far-fetched. The permission of the co-presence of constructions and their derived ones in cognitive grammar (Langacker, 1987) renders it very much in compliance with both functional models and will help fix a production mechanism for the combined model.

A preliminary delimitation for such a model is that the only units permitted are constructions, which may include phonemes, consonant clusters, syllable structures, stress and rhythmic patterns etc. that constitutes an inheritance hierarchy. Also included are the second-order schemas that are abstracted from the above-listed constructions. Such a hierarchy is the result of two broad kinds of constraints: time-conditioned articulatory difficulty and pragmatic aptness which not necessarily works on an either-or basis. To give a pre-taste of how this model could work, a hierarchy of past tense formation in English is presented in the following graph.



What find their ways into the input box at the top is superordinate concatenative schemas like [-ed] → [voiceless] / _

[voiceless], [-ed] → [voiced] / _ [voiced] and superordinate ablaut schema like [i] → [a] that are immanent in concrete past forms like “walked”, “bragged” and “drank ”respectively. Because the past forms of most verbs have been committed to memory, they could be directly reproduced as output in the production stage as indicated by the second box. In cases where the past form of a verb is not registered, abstract schemas would come into play. Speakers would improvise a past form for the verb according to the extent to which these schemas are entrenched. Note that the two output stages indicated by the middle and bottom boxes are not two different stages, they are diagrammed so for the purpose of illustration. In actuality, they are the same process.

Sketchy as it, such a model can already predict what has caused variations, how varied forms are opted for, and why errors that are recorded in Berko’s famous experiments (Berko, 1958) can happen. If such a model is fully substantiated at this level, it could be as competitive as any existing one. In consideration that it also has the potential to include the origins of different past forms, e.g. how strong and weak forms for the past tense have come into being, it is even a better one as it could incorporate diachrony as well as synchrony, and allows gradience.

IV. CONCLUSION

Language is messy, speech sounds may be even more so. But messy parts of language and speech sounds are still legitimate parts of language and for this reason they are also legitimate objects of scientific investigation. Theorists like generative linguists and classic OT practitioners more often than not try to make a distinction between the core and the peripheral to validate their hypothesis that language is a tidy autonomous system. But this tidy-mindedness does not lead to tidy theories.

Language and its phonological module are complex adaptive systems. Every piece of them results as an optimum from communicative pressures of different natures. The pursuit for the explanation of them in terms of functional optimality represents a psychologically plausible paradigm and will surely bear fruits.

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The Usefulness of Using Generalizing Words for Teaching Summary Writing

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Abstract—Different approaches have been used to teach EFL students summary writing, including a genre-based approach (Chen & Su, 2012), implementing key words and question generation (Chou, 2012), and automatic scaffolding and concept mapping (Yang, 2015). This study aims to explore the effectiveness of another approach – one that might be more appropriate to the participants in this study – using generalizing words (such as “solutions” and “difficulty”). Such words were intended to help students visualize the macro-structure of a passage. In the first phase of this approach, a template containing generalizing words was provided to students to guide them in finding the main points of the passage. In the second phase, students were expected to generate generalizing words themselves. Students were also taught how to achieve paragraph coherence by making use of the generalizing words produced. The experimental group scored slightly higher marks in three measures (i.e., Idea Flow, Paraphrasing Techniques and Total Score) than did the control group in the end-of-course summary writing examination, though the differences were not significant at the 95% confidence level. Questionnaire findings revealed the difficulties perceived by participants in completing a summary task and the ways in which this approach had helped them.

Index Terms—teaching summary writing, genre, paragraph coherence, generalizing words, L2 writing

I. INTRODUCTION

Summary writing, although constituting an important academic skill for university students, has been found to be a difficult task for L2 learners (Alfassi, 2004; Fischer, 2003; Friend, 2001; Kintsch, 1998; Yang, 2014; Yang 2015; Yang 2016). The successful production of a good summary requires such complex cognitive skills as understanding the grammatical and semantic relationship between words in a sentence, grasping the main idea of a paragraph, and subsequently selecting the most important information based on the instructions of a summary task. Esmaili (2002) and Plakans (2009) suggested that students’ difficulty in reading comprehension might hinder them from incorporating the source materials into their summary writing. In the process of selecting the main points and relevant supporting details, students’ knowledge of the text structure also plays an important role. At the later stage of attempting to produce a well-organized summary, a student faces even more various challenges, such as using effective paraphrasing skills and allotting ideas into hierarchy from generality to specificity. Words that are more general (for example, such words as headings) can sometimes be found in a source passage, but it is not uncommon that such general words, to which specific details are subsumed, have to be generated by the summary writers themselves. Such general words, subsuming more specific ideas, are termed *generalizing words* in this present study. (See the definition in the following paragraph.) Nevertheless, the formation of generalizing words may pose a great difficulty for students possessing a relatively low level of English proficiency and a poor ability of abstraction, although students with high skills in these two regards may find it easier to identify the hierarchical relationship between ideas along the scale from generality to specificity.

A *generalizing word* is defined as a word or phrase that gives a general description of the subject of a section of a piece of writing. A generalizing word performs similar functions as a heading/sub-heading, but it is not customary to include a heading/sub-heading in a piece of summary writing. Therefore, there seemed to be a need for the present researcher to create the term *generalizing words* in order to convey to students the message that such words should be incorporated into a summary to improve the organization of the summary. Furthermore, a heading/sub-heading appearing in the original passage may be too general to function well as effective transitional words between sets of important details; in such a case, generalizing words – which can be considered to occur between two ending points along a continuum of specificity (top end: headings/sub-headings; bottom end: specific details) – would become necessary and useful. The differences among the terms *headings*, *generalizing words* and *specific details* are illustrated in the following examples taken from the outline template produced for the source passage “Death: a discovery approach”(Appendix A):

CORRESPONDING HEADING APPEARING IN THE SOURCE PASSAGE:

WAYS TO VIEW DEATH

GENERALIZING WORDS:

Justification for the course; aim of the course; features of the course

SPECIFIC DETAILS:

- Reason 1: Death is not discussed openly in Chinese communities.

- *Reason 2: We are confronted by images of death, often with very violent and graphic images*
- *To inspire students to examine fundamental questions about death.*
- *Multidisciplinary*
- *Department of Applied Social Studies*
- *We need to include a study of ethics, religion and humanism when talking about death. Subjects like euthanasia and living wills are becoming more important in contemporary societies.*

The term *generalizing words* is derived from a conception of generalization. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (1999), *generalization* relates to the “the development of extended taxonomic hierarchies” (p.615). For example, the term *jobs* is “a superordinate term in a taxonomic relationship of hyponymy (kind of) to *librarian* and *museum curator*” (Hood, 2008, p.357). However, the ability to generate *generalizing words* involves an ability that goes beyond the ability of classification (e.g., *librarian* as an instance of *jobs*). To produce generalizing words, the ability of abstraction is required. The example provided by Hood (2008) illustrates that kind of abstraction ability: the relationship between *position* and *where you stand* is an abstraction rather than a classification.

Previous research into summary writing focuses mainly on improving students’ ability to identify the main points and supporting details rather than the way to improve the organization of a summary. The genre-based approach is considered to be effective in helping students to improve the content and the organization of a summary (Chen & Su, 2012). They investigated the effectiveness of teaching forty-one university students in Taiwan the rhetorical structure of a narrative source text -- namely, the setting, initial events, internal responses, attempts, consequences, and reactions (Stein & Glenn, 1979). Another approach involves implementing key words (Chou, 2012; Ercan & Cicekli, 2007; Fritz et al. 2006; Sagarra & Alba, 2006; Wang, Thomas, & Quелlette, 1992) and generating questions (Chou, 2012; De Fina, 1992; Silver & Matsuda, 2002). Chou (2012) examined the summary writing of 111 EFL Taiwanese university second-year students working in the genre of narration. His subjects were required to generate five out of the six journalistic questions (i.e., the 5W1H [who, what, where, why, when, and how] and to identify three keywords from each of the eight assigned readings taken from magazines, newspapers and the Internet). Chou (2012) concluded that the approach of implementation of keywords and question generation was effective in improving the subjects’ scores, which covered four equally weighted subscales: content relevance, coherence, appropriate use of vocab, as well as grammar and spelling. Yet, Chou (2002) did not examine whether the sub-score of coherence had improved.

The third approach focuses on the use of automatic scaffolding and concept mapping (Wu, Hwang, Milrad, Ke, & Huang, 2012; Yang, 2015; Yang 2016). A concept map consists of three levels: the first level involves the central idea in the title; the second level involves the main idea in each paragraph; and the third level involves supporting ideas in each paragraph. Nodes (meaning “main ideas”) and links representing the associations between the main ideas are provided in the concept maps. Yang (2015) concluded that automatic scaffolding – that is, the timely feedback students received from the computerized concept maps – allowed students to adjust the words they extracted from a source passage before starting to write the full summary, thus contributing to the overall higher scores than students in the control group who used only paper-version concept maps. The present study did not use the same three levels used by Yang (2015); rather, the skill of creating generalizing words constitutes the second-level of the three-level outline template. As can be seen in the template in Appendix A, headings constitute the first level, corresponding generalizing words the second, and specific details the third level.

In essence, the present study aims to fill the gap not fully investigated in previous studies by examining how using generalizing words would enhance students’ grasp of the relationship between ideas along the hierarch from generality to specificity, thereby probably contributing to the production of a well-organized summary.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Can the use of generalizing words improve students’ summary writing performance?
2. Do students receiving the summary writing instructions in this present study find the teaching methods and teaching materials useful in helping them to write a good summary?
3. What are students’ difficulties in completing a summary task?

II. METHODOLOGY

The experimental group, taught by the present researcher, consisted of three classes of EAP II students totally 66 Year 1 students, who took the 36-hour course offered by the English Language Centre (ELC) at the City University of Hong Kong in the second semester of 2015-16 school year. Each one of the lesson lasted three hours, and there were twelve lessons in the complete semester. Starting from Lesson 4, roughly half the lesson time was used to teach summary writing, while the other half of the lesson time was used to develop students’ writing proficiency, for example, in using noun phrases, and in constructing complex sentence structures.

Summary writing was one of the writing skills to be examined in the end-of-course examinations. Another writing skill to be examined was the writing of a 600-word argumentative essay incorporating some provided citations. The time allowed in the examination for summary writing was 45 minutes. The reading time allowed to read the two passages and to answer reading comprehension questions was 90 minutes. One of the two passages was also used for the task of writing the summary.

Both the control and the experimental groups scored Level 3 in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) or held equivalent examination results. The HKDSE is the only public examination in the new 3-3-4 education system introduced in Hong Kong secondary schools. Candidates' results are labeled Levels 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, with Level 1 being the lowest and Level 5 the highest. The candidates scoring at the highest level were awarded a score of 5**. To be eligible for admission to a government-subsidized degree program, the minimum requirement for the subject of English Language was set at Level 3.

A questionnaire (Appendix B) intended to collect the students' views of the use of generalizing words and other teaching materials and skills was administered in class in the last lesson of the course on a voluntary basis and anonymously. The students who were present in the class were given five to ten minutes to complete the questionnaire.

The following scores of the summary writing were compared across the two groups using IBM SPSS Statistics 22:

- The total score, and
- The four components –
 - a) Content (30%),
 - b) Paraphrasing Skills (30%),
 - c) Idea Flow (10%), and
 - d) Grammatical Control (30%).

All the markers assigned by the department to score the summary examination scripts underwent a one-hour long marker-training session organized by the Assessment Team before the marking period started. Subsequent to the marking training, markers would collect the examination scripts assigned to them by the General Office, which took care to make sure that markers would not mark the scripts written by students they had actually taught.

THE TREATMENT – SUMMARY-WRITING TEACHING INSTRUCTIONS

Step-by-step explicit instructions were used in this present study. As stated by Hashimoto, Fukuda, & Hironobu, (2015), such an approach can make a summary manageable.

The following stages were involved in the teaching process:

STAGE 1: (Finding the main points of individual paragraphs)

Two passages were used:

First passage:

1. In each paragraph, students were required to underline the most informative sentence that best reflects the main idea of the paragraph.

2. Suggested sentences showing the main idea and important details of each of the paragraphs were provided to students after they had completed their task. Justifications concerning why the suggested answers constituted the main points; the important details were provided by the teacher after the students were given an opportunity to compare their work with the suggested answers.

Second passage:

Similar steps were followed when using the second passage, but students had to express the main ideas and the important details of each paragraph in their own words rather than by merely copying verbatim from the original passage. Asking students to use their own words to express the main ideas of a passage was intended to call the students' attention to the need to paraphrase sentences taken from the passage.

In addition to providing justifications for the selection of the main points and important details, the teacher also drew the students' attention to how the original sentences had been paraphrased.

STAGE 2: (The introduction of generalizing words to indicate the functions of paragraphs)

Two passages were used:

1. In each paragraph, students were required to underline the most informative sentence that would include the main idea of the paragraph. This step was also used in STAGE 1.

2. A table with generalizing words (e.g., *benefits*, *arguments against*) was provided to students. They were required to complete the table by supplying the main points and the important details that would match the given generalizing words. A table with generalizing words served the function of providing the students with an outline of the source passage, which should be useful in helping students see the structure of a text (Hashimoto, Fukuda, & Okazaki, 2015)

3. After students had completed the aforementioned task, suggested answers (which were displayed in the format of a table containing generalizing words, main points and important details) were provided to students (Appendix A). Explanations were given by the teacher after the students had compared their work with the teacher's suggested answers.

4. Students were asked to write a summary of the entire passage, paying attention to the ways used to link up different parts of the passage by using generalizing words to indicate the macro structure of the summary.

5. A sample summary was provided to students (Appendix C). How generalizing words had been used to improve the organization of the text was explained to students. In addition, the teacher also drew students' attention to how the original sentences were paraphrased.

STAGE 3: (The generation of generalizing words by students)

Two passages were used:

Similar steps as those in Stage 2 were used except that students were required to generate generalizing words rather than being provided with them.

The control group consisted of EAP II students taught by other ELC teachers. The General Office of the ELC randomly selected 66 scripts from the entire collection of examination papers, thus matching the number of examination scripts from the experimental group. The students in the control group were not taught generalizing words in their process of learning summary writing. The teaching materials provided in the EAP II Student Booklet covered such general skills as recognizing the genre of a passage, recognizing the main ideas of paragraphs, crossing less important details, and using cohesive devices to show relationships of ideas. Further, to the best knowledge of the present researcher, the term *generalizing words* has not been used in related body of literature.

III. RESULTS

Summary-Writing Examination results

The five examination scores of the two groups are shown in Table 1.

As can be seen in Table 1, three scores out of five awarded to the experimental group were slightly higher than those of the control group, although they were not significantly different at $p \leq 0.05$ (Total Score: 10.74 versus 10.55; Paraphrasing Skills: 2.61 versus 2.44; Idea flow: 2.85 versus 2.73).

TABLE 1:
THE SCORES OF THE TWO GROUPS AT THE END-OF-COURSE SUMMARY EXAMINATION

	Group	N	mean	Std. Deviation	Significance (2-tailed)
Content	1	66	2.48	1.0410	0.445
	2	66	2.62	1.004	0.445
Paraphrasing Skills	1	66	2.61	0.721	2.225
	2	66	2.44	0.844	2.225
Idea flow	1	66	2.85	0.438	0.173
	2	66	2.73	0.570	0.173
Grammar	1	66	2.79	0.512	0.589
	2	66	2.83	0.450	0.589
Total score	1	66	10.74	1.932	0.569
	2	66	10.55	2.032	0.569

(Group 1: Experimental Group; Group 2: Control Group)

Questionnaire findings

The participants' views on the suggested methods of writing a well-organized summary

Table 2 below shows the experimental group's views on the usefulness of the teaching materials studied in class. It was found that the two teaching aids – a template containing generalizing words and the list of main points -- were considered to be useful by an overwhelming majority of respondents.

TABLE 2:
PERCEPTION OF THE USEFULNESS OF THE TEACHING MATERIALS USED IN CLASS

	Yes (Percentage)	No (Percentage)
a. Are the templates (i.e., blank tables with headings provided) given by the teacher to show the macro structure of the passages useful to you?	94.8	5.2
b. Is the list of main points provided to you (after you have attempted to find the main points yourself) useful to you?	100	0
c. Are you willing to use the steps* taught in class for your future summary writing?	100	0

* The steps consisting of: previewing/finding the main idea of each paragraph/determining which ideas to keep for the summary based on word limit/thinking of generalizing words to group ideas for better idea flow/cutting unnecessary words by working on sentence structures.

Question 2: Do you still have problems thinking of generalizing words to group related ideas together for better organization?

Yes: 37.7%

No: 62.3%

Question 3: What do you think are the main advantages of the suggested skills of writing a summary? (You may consider more than one)

Table 3 below shows the percentages of respondents indicating the main advantage(s) of the summarizing skills learnt in the course:

TABLE 3:
MAIN ADVANTAGE(S) OF THE SUGGESTED SKILLS OF WRITING A SUMMARY

Main Advantage	Percentage
The template with headings can show me the structure of a passage, thus helping me to find the main points more easily.	65.6
The use of generalizing words helps me to organize individual points, thus improving the organization of a summary.	57.4
Having to think of generalizing words improves my critical thinking.	26.2

Table 3 shows that more than half of the participants indicated that they had benefited in the following activities: a) finding main points, and b) organizing a piece of summary. However, most of the respondents did not find that the process of generating generalizing words on their own improved their critical thinking. It is possible that their lack of familiarity with pertinent lexicon played a significant part in their limitations; indeed, the participants' lower level proficiency may have invalidated the significance of this finding.

Summary of Questionnaire Findings

The questionnaire findings indicate that the use of generalizing word -- provided by the present researcher at the initial stage in the process of teaching summarizing and subsequently generated by the participants -- appears to have made summary writing a more manageable task for students possessing low-level English proficiency. Two important teaching aids -- first, a template containing generalizing words to show the macro structure of a passage; second, a list of main points that had been paraphrased -- had been indicated by an overwhelming majority of participants to be useful. In particular, the participants appeared to believe that they had benefited from the teaching in two regards: a) finding main points more easily, and b) grouping the main points in a more organized manner.

However, about 40% of the students from the experimental group still found it difficult to think of generalizing words, although more than half of the respondents indicated that they did not have difficulty generating generalizing words. The difficulties of the students having problems generating generalizing words include the following (as indicated in responses to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire):

- Not understanding individual sentences,
- Not understanding the main idea of a paragraph,
- Vocabulary problems,
- Not able to come up with ideas.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The slightly higher scores in the three measures (i.e., Paraphrasing Skills, Idea Flow and Total Score) awarded to the experimental group might suggest that, though not significant, the use of generalizing words had helped develop the students' summarizing ability to some extent. There are two possible reasons for the slightly higher scores. First, the score of Idea Flow was awarded largely based on the organization of the ideas presented in a summary. Second, generalizing words are meant to improve the organization of a summary. Given these assumptions, it was possible to assume that the slightly higher scores in Idea Flow might be the result of the use of generalizing words. Similarly, the provision of examples of paraphrased sentences in the six sample summaries were meant to improve students' paraphrasing skills; the award of marks to "Paraphrasing Skills" was based on whether the ideas written in a summary were expressed in students' own words, whether or not the sentences written in the summary were in fact the main points of the passage.

However, because the score differences in these measures were not significant, the claim that the use of generalizing words and the sample paraphrased sentences might have produced positive effects on students' summary writing performance can only be tentative.

The insignificance of the differences in the scores in the three categories (i.e., Idea Flow, Paraphrasing Techniques and Total Score) between the two groups might be due to the ineffectiveness of the generalizing words as a means to improve students' summarizing performance. This speculation seems reasonable, since about 40% of the participants in the experimental group expressed the concern that they had difficulty generating appropriate generalizing words. Perhaps a pre-requisite to writing a good summary lies in a student's linguistic ability to understand a sentence as well as his/her knowledge of discourse structure. It is highly likely that, if a student cannot make sense of individual sentences, s/he may not be able to generate generalizing words, especially among those students who cannot use effective previewing skills to generate generalizing words.

A further reason for the insignificance of the findings might be that it would take a much longer period of time for learners to improve their summarizing skills. As mentioned earlier, the subjects in this report were only taught summarizing skills for 13.5 hours -- that is, from Lesson 4 to Lesson 12 -- and only for 1.5 hours in each lesson. In view of this time constraint, future studies could incorporate a substantially longer period of time for teaching summarizing skills.

The finding that the experimental group's score in Content was not higher than that of the control group despite the former's slightly higher score in Idea Flow is worth discussing. The experimental group's lower marks in Content possibly means that generalizing words did not actually help students to find the main points, perhaps because their language ability was so low that they were simply unable to understand individual sentences. However, it is interesting

to observe that these students, who were weak at reading comprehension, were still able to obtain slightly higher marks in “Idea Flow,” a phenomenon that might be due to the fact that they still were able to write a summary in which ideas were logically connected, although those ideas were not the main points, by applying the skills making use of generalizing words.

To conclude, the teaching of generalizing words in the present study has not yielded significant differences in the five examination scores between the control and the experimental groups, although the slightly higher scores in three of them (i.e., Idea Flow, Paraphrasing skills and Total Score) seem to suggest that the usefulness of generalizing words might deserve further investigation. It would be useful to involve students with a high level of English proficiency who have the basic linguistic ability to understand the meaning of individual sentences for future research studies.

APPENDIX A. PART OF THE OUTLINE TEMPLE (WITH SUGGESTED ANSWERS) PRODUCED FOR THE PASSAGE DEATH: A DISCOVERY APPROACH (TAKEN FROM THE EAP II COURSE BOOK USED BY THE PARTICIPANTS IN THIS STUDY):

(Students were reminded to paraphrase the words provided in the article when they wrote their summaries.)

Headings	Corresponding generalizing words that could be used to introduce a set of details	Specific details
WAYS TO VIEW DEATH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justification for the course 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reason 1: Death is not discussed openly in Chinese communities. • Reason 2: We are confronted by images of death, often with very violent and graphic images
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aim of the course 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To inspire students to examine fundamental questions about death
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feature of the course 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multidisciplinary
INTER-DISCIPLINARY INPUT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First perspective: social 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Applied Social Studies • We need to include a study of ethics, religion and humanism when talking about death. Subjects like euthanasia and living wills are becoming more important in contemporary societies.

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE SUMMARY WRITING

Dear EAP Part II Students,

You are cordially invited to participate in a research study investigating the effectiveness of the summarizing skills I taught you in this course. Hopefully, the findings can contribute to the teaching of summary in the future. Students' responses elicited in the questionnaire will be analyzed collectively and anonymously. No individuals will be identified in the report of findings. I would be happy to share the findings with you when they are ready upon your request.

Read the questions below and indicate your opinion by circling the appropriate number:

1. During the experience of learning to write a summary, I have become more aware that:	1= Totally disagree 3=Neutral 5= Totally agree				
a) It is important to preview a passage to know the general ideas;	1	2	3	4	5
b) I should find out the main idea of each paragraph;	1	2	3	4	5
c) A main idea is a statement including some specific information rather than merely general ideas stating what the paragraph is about.	1	2	3	4	5
d) Summary writing is primarily a process of selecting and weighing the importance of ideas based on the word limit;	1	2	3	4	5
e) An introductory sentence (i.e., one specifying the author, the publication year and the focus of a passage) can improve the organization of the summary;	1	2	3	4	5
f) Generalizing words (i.e., words performing the function of headings) can improve the organization of a summary.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The process of learning to a write a summary helped me to improve my ability:	1= Totally disagree 3=Neutral 5= Totally agree				
a) To preview a passage;	1	2	3	4	5
b) To find the main points of a passage;	1	2	3	4	5
c) To write an effective introductory sentence;	1	2	3	4	5
d) To use generalizing words to organize various points;	1	2	3	4	5
e) To use various language skills to cut words to meet the word limit.	1	2	3	4	5

3. The suggested method of writing a well-organized summary

<p>a) Do you find the templates (e.g., blank tables with headings supplied) I provided to you useful in making the macro structure of the passages clear to you?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes. The templates are useful.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No. The templates are not useful.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____</p>
<p>b) Do you think that you have benefited in the long term by seeing the list of main points provided by me after you have attempted to find the main points yourself?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____</p>
<p>c) Will you consider using the steps* taught in this class for you future summary writing?</p> <p>*Previewing → find the main idea of each paragraph → determine which main ideas to keep for the summary based on the word limit → think of generalizing words to group ideas for better idea flow → cut unnecessary words by working on sentence structures.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____</p>
<p>4. Do you still have problems thinking of generalizing words to group related ideas for better organization?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes. What are your current major problems in generating generalizing words?</p> <p>_____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No. I don't think I have problems generating generalizing words.</p>
<p>5. What do you think is the main advantage of the suggested skills of writing a summary? (You may choose more than one answer.)</p> <p>a) The template with headings can show me the structure of a passage, thus helping me to find the main point more easily;</p> <p>b) The use of generalizing words helps me to organize individual points, thus improving the organization of a summary;</p> <p>c) Having to think of generalizing words improves my critical thinking;</p> <p>d) Others: _____</p> <p>e) I don't find the above skills useful. Please specify reason(s):</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
THANK YOU!

The following personal information will help me interpret the findings from this study. I would be grateful if you could complete this part of the questionnaire as well.

Gender: Male ___ Female ___

Date of Birth: _____

(Month) _____ (Year) _____

Your first language: _____

If you speak Chinese as your first language, please specify the variety of Chinese you speak (e.g., Cantonese, Hakka, Mandarin): _____

Major/program: _____

City where you received your secondary education: _____

Grade in the Use of English in HKDSE: _____

Year obtaining the exam results: _____

Name(s) of other English proficiency test(s) taken (E.g. IELTS): _____

Exam results: _____

Year obtaining the exam results: _____

THANK YOU!

APPENDIX C. A SAMPLE SUMMARY OF THE PASSAGE *DEATH: A DISCOVERY APPROACH*

This article introduces a GE course aiming to encourage CityU students to examine death from three perspectives: social, scientific, and legal – featuring the collaboration of three departments. The justification for such a course is that talking about death is a social taboo, but youngsters are often bombarded the graphic images of death in daily life. The first perspective concerns morality, humanism and religions; the second examines the natural life cycle of cells, possibly hinting at ways to treat cancer and making humans immortal; and the third examines legal matters in handling suicide, and end-of-life issues. While addressing the issue of youngsters being a sensitive group, positive thinking towards death constitutes the underlying principles of various activities held in the course. (120 words)

APPENDIX D. PART OF THE TEACHING MATERIALS IN THE STUDENT COURSE BOOKLET FOR TEACHING SUMMARIZING SKILLS

Source: UNIT 4, EAP II Student Booklet 2014-15

Task 5

An Introduction to summaries

Summarising is a skill that is extremely useful in your university studies. Summarising involves finding the main ideas in a text and presenting them in your own words.

To write an effective summary, you need to:

1. read the text well. This means you should find the main ideas, look at genre, text structure. You should also pay attention to cohesive features (general nouns, lexical chains and semantic sets, general noun, referencing...), the author's stance/opinion...The questions in task 4 have helped you do this with the text 'Learning about life'
2. write a good text in your own words that accurately reflects the original and flows well (is coherent): use hypernyms, paraphrasing techniques (see unit 3), reflect the genre and text structure, theme patterns...

Task 5A

Discuss the following questions in groups. Write your answers in the space provided.

A. What makes a good summary

Brainstorm the elements of a good summary

B. Steps taken when writing a summary

C. What are the features of a good summary?

- It should be about 10%-15% of the original in length.
- It should start with an opening sentence which introduces the topic. It should focus exclusively on main points, omitting details, examples, supporting quotations, description, etc.
- It should include ALL the main points of the original.
- If the original is discussing an issue, it should clearly show the author's opinion.
- It should NOT include things that were not in the original, like your own ideas about the topic.
- It should be IN YOUR OWN WORDS.
- It should be clear to a reader who has not read the original.

D. What are the steps in writing a summary?

1. Read the text.

2. Identify the genre then look for organizational patterns.
 3. Reread the text, underlining the main ideas/key points and crossing out less important details, examples, etc. Pay particular attention to the introduction, topic sentences and the conclusion.
 4. Take notes of all the main ideas/key points in the margin or on a separate piece of paper. Do this in your own words
 5. Begin with an opening sentence which introduces the topic. Remember the reader of the summary may not have read the original text.
 6. Mention the important facts in a logical / chronological order. This may not be the same as in the original text.
 7. As you write, do not copy the original. These strategies (which you have seen in Unit 3) can help you:
 - Using synonyms
 - Changing the form of individual words, e.g. verbs to nouns
 - Using an alternative sentence structure
 - Using the passive / changing passive to active forms
 - Changing single nouns to plural nouns and vice versa
 - Adding your own cohesive devices to show the relationships between the ideas
- If possible, try not to 'stick' to the original when writing your summary. Imagine you are re-telling the text to a friend. Get the ideas in your head and then try to write the summary without referring to the original. This skill gets easier with more practice!
8. Check that your summary reflects the original.

Recognizing genre when summarizing

Many texts are examples of one of the following genres. If you can recognize it and its associated organizational pattern, it may make your task easier.

- Description or narrative
- Cause and effect
- Comparison and contrast
- Classification and division

Task 6

Note: The features of a good summary above are relevant for this course but might not be the same in other courses or for other types of summaries.

A summary is also a type of citation that is especially useful in longer papers. When including a summary in an essay, you need to use the same citation techniques you would use for a direct quote or a paraphrase: name of the author and date should be present.

EAP 2 final exam requirements:

In EAP part 2, you are assessed on your ability to extract the relevant ideas of a text (according to the guiding question given), to summarise them in your own words while staying true to the original meaning. The EAP Final exam summary is not used as a citation so you are NOT required to write the name of the author or the date (as you would when using a summary in an essay). You are required to start your summary with an opening sentence that encapsulates the text's main message.

In the exam, the summary word count will be specified and should be between 10 and 15% of the original.

Constructing a summary

In small groups, write a summary of the text. "Learning about Life". Look at the guiding question below to help you select relevant main ideas from the text:

You are writing a report about interdisciplinary GE courses at City University. Summarise the information about the course "Death: A Discovery Approach" in the text "Learning about Life" to include in your report.

- ▶ Start with an overall opening sentence
- ▶ Rephrase the main points and write them into ONE coherent paragraph
- ▶ Check that you are including only main points
- ▶ Make sure you keep within the word limit (10 to 15% of the original)
- ▶ Are all the ideas relevant to the guiding question?
- ▶ Are you reflecting the author's ideas/opinions truthfully?
- ▶ Are you using your own words (as far as possible)?
- ▶ Is your summary perfectly clear to a reader who has not seen the original?

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Study on China's Languages' Status Planning for "The Belt and Road Initiative": Proposing the Ecology-of-language Paradigm*

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Abstract—Focusing on China's languages' status planning for "The Belt and Road Initiative", this paper constructs a framework for China's languages' status planning goals and studies its application of Chinese and minority languages in the social context of "The Belt and Road Initiative" raised by China in 2013. The paper points out the focuses of Chinese and minority languages' status planning in the form of both status policy planning and status cultivation planning and makes a detailed analysis from the ecology of languages paradigm. It is concluded that China's languages' status planning for "The Belt and Road Initiative" should focus on the international language spread of Chinese as second language, the inheritance of Chinese as heritage language, and language maintenance and language revival of the minorities, by providing different platforms for the languages to function complementarily at different levels. The paper also looks forward the application of ecology-of-language paradigm in China's language planning would trend a sustainable road for language ecological crisis and human sustainable development in the construction of the Belt and Road for building a community with a shared future for mankind.

Index Terms—language status planning, "The Belt and Road Initiative", status policy planning, status cultivation planning, "coexistence of variety, harmony in diversity"

I. INTRODUCTION

With the coming of a new era marked by the theme of peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit, in 2013 China raised an initiative of jointly building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road (hereinafter as the Belt and Road), which is to promote the economic prosperity of the countries along the Belt and Road and regional economic cooperation, strengthen exchanges and mutual learning between different civilizations, and promote world peace and development. According to the incomplete statistics, there are altogether about 50 official or national common languages and more than 150 regional, minority and tribal languages involved among the 65 countries alongside. As cultural, social and economic resources, languages are characterized by variety, abundance, value potential and exploitability, which has been recognized globally. So, language planning is usually taken as one significant part in a country's resources development and planning worldwide. For China, the construction of the Belt and Road need no doubt the support of various languages for cross-national and cross-ethnic understanding. Therefore, studies on China's languages' status planning for "The Belt and Road Initiative" which focus on the social status and function of diversified languages and their relationships have become one of the principal issues and assignments closely connected with cultural heritage, economic progress, political stability and safe maintenance of China. In the world today, with the deepening and acceleration of economic globalization and world integration, English has been undoubtedly the world language, language diversity has been threatened and language ecological crisis has been triggered, in which that of China is no exception.

In the face of the new language situation at home and abroad, how to develop China's language resources so that Chinese and minority languages could serve the country better? By analyzing the language motives and language ideology from the perspective of language ecology, the paper states the new characteristics of China's language situation, points out the focuses of its languages' status planning in the form of both status policy planning and status cultivation planning, and advocates the correlated inner relationships between status planning, corpus planning, language-in-education planning, and prestige planning. The paper aims to provide a reference for the notion and practice of different languages' status planning in the new social context of "The Belt and Road Initiative".

II. RELATED THEORETICAL BASIS FOR THE RESEARCH

A. Language Ecology

Language ecology, now also called ecology-of-language paradigm originated from American linguist Einar Haugen's "ecology of language" in the form of a metaphor. In the 1970s, Haugen published an article entitled *The Ecology of*

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Language in which he pointed out the flaws of earlier linguistic science of historical comparative linguistics, structuralism, and generative grammar which are conducted mainly in the descriptive fields as being phonology, grammar, lexicon, etc. By defining language ecology as “the study of interactions between languages and their environment” (Haugen, 1972, p. 325), Haugen called for special attention on the social status and function of the language rather than the history of language, number and location of its speakers. Furthermore, he defines that the ecology of a language is psychological in that it interacts with other languages in speakers’ mind, as well as sociological with the society in which it functions. In other words, language ecology is the combination of language ideology and relations between languages and their social context.

However, the notion of language ecology has been neglected for quite a few years and afterwards revisited in Mühlhäusler’s works until in 1990s, which agree with Haugen’s metaphorically grounded theory and propose that the key property of a language ecology is structured diversity. Just as what Mühlhäusler (1996) has put it, “The ecological metaphor...is action oriented. It shifts the attention from linguists being players of academic language games to becoming shop stewards for linguistic diversity, and to addressing moral economic and other ‘non-linguistic’ issues” (p. 2).

With the deepening of the language inequality on the minorities, Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson’s (2008) interpretation of language ecology has largely widened its scope mainly from the perspective of linguistic human rights, advocating maximal support for linguistic diversity and additive multilingualism especially foreign languages teaching and learning.

All in all, language ecology is a theory integrating the cognitive view of ecology into linguistics and exploring more about the non-linguistic elements such as ecological crisis and human sustainable development which are closely related with language in a broad social context. A new paradigm has emerged, suggests Ricento (2000), based on a “synthesis of elements of critical theory with an ecology of languages approach” (p. 20).

In short, as one of the guiding ideologies and the means of formulation of language policy and planning, ecology-of-language paradigm focuses on the following aspects related with language status planning: the maintenance of the functions and status of different languages in the language order; the advocacy of multilingualism, bilingualism and foreign language teaching; the safeguarding of the rights of the mother tongue, especially the rights of the minorities; the calling for minority language maintenance and cultivation; and the emphasis on the cultural attributes and identity of languages.

B. A Framework for Language Status Planning from the Perspective of Language Ecology

Facing to the hegemony of English and ecological crisis of minority languages, from the 1990s, scholars worldwide are increasingly turning to the metaphor of ecology to think and talk about language planning in a multilingual environment. For example, drawing on the ideas of the former researchers on models-constituting (e.g., Ferguson 1968, Neustupny 1974, Fishman 1972, Haugen 1983, Haarmann 1990) and goals-concentrating (e.g., Annamalai & Rubin 1980; Nahir 1984, Bentahila & Davies 1983). Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) illustrates a mode an ecological model for language planning in which national language (including its variety), minority languages and endangered languages, together with the various forces at work make up a linguistic ecosystem (See Figure 1).

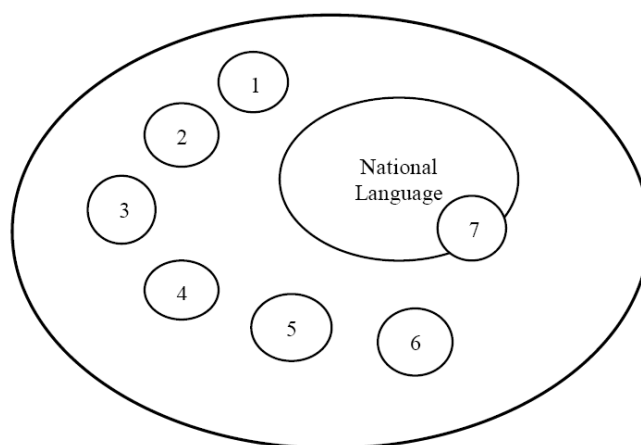


Figure 1 A linguistic eco-system¹ in the language planning (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997, p. 311)

Mühlhäusler (2000) even defines language planning from the ecological view that it “should address the problem of maintaining linguistic diversity and concentrate on the ecological factors that sustain diversity” (p. 358). Hornberger (2002) suggests ethnic and linguistic pluralism as resources for nation-building and argues that multilingual language policies are opening up “ideological and implementational space in the environment for as many languages as possible,

¹Smaller circles numbered 1 to 5 represent minority languages in the community; smaller circle numbered 6 represents a language that is likely to die in the near future; smaller circle numbered 7 represents a nonstandard variety of the official language (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997, p. 311).

particularly endangered languages, to evolve and flourish rather than dwindle and disappear” (p. 8) by turning to the metaphor of ecology. In 2003, Kaplan and Baldauf (2003) provides an expanded framework for language planning goals on the basis of Hornberger (1994), in which the framework for language status planning goals goes in Table 1.

TABLE 1
A FRAMEWORK FOR LANGUAGE STATUS PLANNING GOALS (KAPLAN & BALDAUF, 2003, P. 202)

Approaches <i>Types (overt - covert)</i>	1. Policy Planning (on form) Goals	2. Cultivation Planning (on function) Goals
1. Status Planning (about society)	Status Standardisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Officialisation • Nationalisation • Proscription 	Revival <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restoration • Revitalisation • Reversal Maintenance Interlingual Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International • Intra-national Spread

According to Kaplan and Baldauf’s framework, status policy planning refers to standardisation, that is, defining the particular status language(s) hold in a society. It may be done either overtly through legislation or constitutions or occur implicitly. Overt status standardisation may take the form of officialization and nationalization of a language and/or proscription of the language rights. The primary status planning includes jobs on language revival, language maintenance, inter-lingual communication and language spread. Status cultivation planning examines how these particular status goals for languages may be met.

The paper then constructs a framework for China’s language status planning, shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2
A FRAMEWORK FOR CHINA’S LANGUAGE STATUS PLANNING

Status Planning (overt→covert)	Policy Planning	Cultivation Planning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Status Standardisation • language officialisation • language nationalisation • human linguistic rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Language Revival ◆ Language Maintenance ◆ Interlingual Communication ◆ Language Spread

With the guidance of the ecology-of-language paradigm and this newly-built framework, the paper would firstly explore China’s language situation nowadays, and then analyze the focuses of status cultivation planning in the new language context characterized with “The Belt and Road Initiative”, since it is the cultivation planning that normally support the policy planning goals.

III. CHINA’S LANGUAGES’ STATUS PLANNING FOR “THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE”: FROM A PERSPECTIVE OF LANGUAGE ECOLOGY

A. Language Spread in Status Cultivation Planning: International Localization of Chinese

History shows that the strength of the language is closely linked to the rise and fall of the country. A strong language, in turn, will promote the country’s strength. According to the framework constructed for China’s language planning, language spread is one of the important goals of status cultivation planning, as well as its parts. Therefore, the international spread of Chinese could be taken as an important means for the development of China’s soft power. In the languages’ status planning for “The Belt and Road Initiative”, the international promotion and dissemination of Chinese is undoubtedly one of its major contents. Some scholars have proposed that a new era of globalization featuring the inclusive nature of “The Belt and Road Initiative” is coming (Wang, 2016). In order to help achieve true “inclusive globalization” and allow globalization to become a balanced and benefit-sharing one through inclusiveness, Chinese should take the road of “international localization”. In the context of the new era of globalization, the “international localization” of Chinese status planning can be implemented from the following two dimensions: one is the international spread of Chinese as second language and the other, the inheritance of Chinese as a heritage language.

1. International spread of Chinese as second language

“The Belt and Road Initiative” upholds the concept of win-win cooperation through common ground while shelving differences, inclusiveness, peaceful coexistence and symbiotic development. Then what is the concept and connotation of international spread of Chinese for “The Belt and Road Initiative”? The spread of language needs the opportunities from the times. The proposal of China’s “The Belt and Road Initiative” and the improvement of its economic strength and international status have greatly stimulated the urgent needs of Chinese in the world and created a rare historical opportunity for the development of international Chinese.

From the perspective of language ecology, the international spread of Chinese as second language is the external communication of Chinese culture, but it is not exclusive. The process of Chinese realizing “international localization”

step by step includes localization of Chinese teaching as second language, local cultivation of Chinese teachers, the integration of Chinese and Chinese culture with the languages and cultures of the target country, etc. Furthermore, the development of international Chinese will enhance the ecological niche of Chinese in the world's linguistic ecosystem and be conducive to the construction and improvement of the world's linguistic ecological environment. Tsuda (1994) receive Phillipson's (1992) linguistic imperialism and proposes the ecology-of-language paradigm as counterstrategy of the hegemony of English and cultural homogeneity in the world so that linguistic and cultural pluralism will be secured worldwide. According to language ecology, the spread of Chinese as second language abroad is one kind of effort to balance the linguistic ecosystem worldwide.

However, according to Crystal (2003) the economic factors would work in the population of languages and the size of its domain of use, hereafter the international spread of the language. Therefore, if we combine the international development goals of Chinese with those of the target countries, especially their economic interests, Chinese could probably enjoy the high status of international Chinese and become one of the preferred foreign languages between the countries along the Belt and Road for building a community with a shared future for mankind.

2. Inheritance of Chinese as heritage language

The paper would also extend its vision to the inheritance of Chinese/Mandarin as heritage language, which is always an indispensable but easily overlooked area of international promotion and dissemination in the Chinese status planning. Chinese (also called Mandarin abroad) is the heritage language of all the Chinese people all over the world. However, at present, the education of overseas Chinese as heritage language is faced with the unfavorable situation of unbalanced education level, limited depth and width, shortage of staff, etc. Relevant research shows that the language shift in Chinese of Chinese-Americans is basically completed within three generations, that is, the third-generation of the Chinese immigrants in the United States have largely lost their ability to speak and use Chinese.

But from the perspective of the language ecology, it is also overseas Chinese immigrants' human linguistic rights to learn their heritage language. Moreover, the inheritance of Chinese as heritage language is not only to maintain Chinese language in the Chinese ethnic groups from generation to generation, but more importantly to inherit the national characters and cultural identity bearing behind the language. The inheritance of Chinese could be taken as the key to helping overseas Chinese immigrants and their descendants to solve the confusion between language identity, ethnic identity and even national identity.

The notion of ecology in language planning suggests both that there are a number of other languages with different functions from that of the national language and, more importantly, that there are structured relationships between all these languages. The promotion of the exchanging of other languages and cultures in the world with the Chinese through the inheritance of Chinese is a contribution made by China to the maintenance of the language and culture diversity of the target countries and to the harmony of world linguistic ecology. As the minority languages of other countries, Chinese occupies the status of second or foreign language, which is one of the important resources to be cultivated and should be taken into consideration seriously in the language planning.

In the meanwhile, the economic development of a country creates opportunities for the spread of language. Therefore, in the construction of the Belt and Road, the international depth and width of the promotion and dissemination of Chinese language and its sustainable development in the future will ultimately depend on the growth of Chinese language's economic value and the enhancement of China's economic strength. By adhering to the purpose of safeguarding the diversity of the world's languages and cultures based on the global ecology and national economy, we could possibly make Chinese an international language.

B. Language Maintenance in Status Cultivation Planning: Utilization of Cross-border Languages

1. Minority languages and cross-border languages

Under the background of "The Belt and Road Initiative", the planning of China's language resources should also focus on the minority languages, the valuable language resources which should be maintained and cultivated in China. It is noteworthy that there are some countries adjacent to the border with China along the Belt and Road, whose official or national languages are the cross-border minorities' languages (hereinafter as cross-border languages) in China. Cross-border languages could be taken as a special linguistic landscape in China's minority languages. Because of their distinctive advantages in cross-border ethnic identification and mutual communication for the adjacent countries along the Belt and Road, the cross-border languages would play a complementary and even irreplaceable role in the promotion of the five major goals (policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds) of "The Belt and Road Initiative" besides Chinese and other international languages, e.g. English. In the framework for China's language status planning, status standardisation is the goal of status policy planning, and language maintenance is one of the important goals of status cultivation planning, as well as its part. However, it is a pity that many China's cross-border languages which are confronted with language vitality crisis are just treated as general minority languages, without explicit language status in China's historical language planning, not to mention their clear positioning in the national interests.

2. Language economy development plan of cross-border languages

Economic globalization has accelerated the language shift of minority languages to national and international languages around the world. The minority's language ecology in China is also not optimistic. Due to the increasing number of minority languages retreating to the second languages of the minority groups, the loss of mother tongues of

the minority language users is serious. The number of minority communities, together with the number and vitality of their languages are declining. The northeastern and southwestern areas where the China's cross-border languages are relatively concentrated are bordered by many countries along the Belt and Road, but they are the areas where the most endangered languages in China are distributed. Baker (2001) holds that "in the language of ecology, the strongest ecosystems are those that are the most diverse. Diversity is directly related to stability; variety is important for long-term survival" (p. 281). According to language ecology, the existence of declining and endangered languages makes the linguistic balance of a country's language ecosystem under destruction and the multicultural inheritance is a concern. Therefore, the survival and development of cross-border languages are closely related with the language ecological balance and sustainable development of multi-cultures in China. How to maintain and develop the cross-border languages so that they could better serve the country in the context of the Belt and Road is an important goal for China's minority languages' status cultivation planning?

Ecological thinking on language planning has some distinguishing characteristics, and one of them is the consideration not just of language factors but wider environmental ones, in which economy is a vital one. As one of the focuses of linguistic economics, the study of the relationship between language and economy under the theory of human capital shows that language is a kind of social resource and natural resource with value, utility, cost and benefit, paying emphasis on the function and position of the language. This paper thus argues that the enhancement of language economic value, utility and benefit in the minorities' language situations could be practical and effective in cross-border languages' status cultivation planning in China.

When the cross-border languages have been taken as the public products with value, utility and benefit, the language employment brought by language consumption can really promote the maintenance of cross-border languages. At the same time, since the beginning of the 21st century, the language industry is booming. And the language economy has been in an ascendant as a new source of economic growth and played a more and more remarkable role in building a harmonious language situation. According to the new language situations worldwide, the development of the language industry is an important embodiment of language economy in the minority languages' status cultivation planning for "The Belt and Road Initiative". Therefore, by proposing the language economy development plan of cross-border languages, developing a cross-border language economy model oriented to language industries including language service, language translation, language publication, etc. is practical and conducive to the economic benefits for the cross-border languages users. Finally, the goal of language maintenance would be achieved by improving the language vitality in the language economy.

Although the maintenance of the minority languages and cultures in the world conflicts with the deepening of economic globalization, combining cross-border languages with the language economy to create a rigid market for needs and to transform the national cultural values of languages into economic values could be taken as one of the effective ways to protect cross-border languages and most minority languages. The country should create favorable conditions for the conversion of language economic values, formulate relevant language policies and make investments in language costs.

IV. CONCLUSION

"The Belt and Road Initiative" has opened a new era of globalization for all things connected. Therefore, from the perspective of language ecology, the paper tries to propose an ecological language planning for the Chinese and cross-border languages in China for the construction of the Belt and Road. Cai (2012) has ever commented, as a new paradigm of linguistics, language ecology "provides theoretical support for studying the impact of globalization on the linguistic and cultural diversity of the world as well as on the government's response to linguistic problems such as language policy and planning" (p. 212), and "The new paradigm is closely related to the macro-relationship of sustainable development of human civilization" (Cai, 2012, p. 212).

The paper concludes that ecology-of-language paradigm to different languages' status planning also reflects a Chinese-characteristic inclusive notion of "coexistence of variety, harmony in diversity" and presents a new harmonious view on languages' status planning in the new era of globalization marked by the theme of peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit.

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The Study of Chinese-English Trademark Translation

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Abstract—Trademark is a symbol of products and the core of commodity culture. Most of trademarks have specific national cultural connotation. If commodity be seen as a carrier of culture transmission, trademark translation must pay more attention to differences of customs under different culture background, in order to avoid negative associations and misunderstanding. Through the analysis of specific cultural differences, this paper expounds some principles that translators should follow in English-Chinese trademark translation. And taking Chinese-English trademark translation as a starting point in this paper, we discuss the specific performance of trademark translation and analyze the cultural differences in animals, plants, colors, numbers and other aspects between Chinese and English countries, so that summarize the methods of trademark translation.

Index Terms—Trademark, translation, cultural differences

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, trademark translation has an important position in international trade. AI Ries, an American scholar, points out that the stand or fall of translated names cause the differences in the millions of dollars in sales performance (AI Ries, 2009). However, the differences of culture produced by regional differences, living environment, thinking mode and living habits lead to people have different understanding of the concept. Therefore, if you want to get good translation of trademarks, the differences in different cultures is considered firstly. If translators cannot deal with the differences caused by culture, consumers can not understand the connotative meaning of trademarks. Good translation can improve the understanding between consumers and manufactures

First part is introduction of this paper. The value of this research is mainly introduced in first part. Second part introduces four principles of trademark translation. Third part gives concrete examples to analyze the trademark translation with words of different association, including different associations of animal, plants, colors, numeral, politics and economy. Fourth part gives examples about trademark names in cultural differences, including differences of individual thoughts, social customs, and religious belief. Fifth part analyzes the problems of Sino-British trademark translation. Firstly, translated names do not conform to the cultural connotation. Secondly, translated names are not very elegant. Thirdly, trademark names translated depend on pronunciation, some of translated words have bad meanings. Sixth part concludes some methods of trademark translation. The last part of this paper is conclusion emphasizing the theme of this research.

II. PRINCIPLES OF TRANSLATION IN CHINESE AND ENGLISH TRADEMARKS

Trademark is a mark used by commodity producers to make their goods different from other businesses in the market, and convey products' information to consumers. On the face of it, trademark translation is a transformation between two languages, but in fact, language is the carrier of culture, so trademark translation is an intercultural communicative activity. As the product image, trademarks often reflect different national aesthetic interests, cultural values and consumer psychology. Thus the trademark translation requires translators must have a deep understanding of the differences between two countries, and focus on the specific application between source languages and target languages. As Eugene Nida, a famous translator, pointed out that familiarity with two cultures is even more important than mastering two languages for a successful translation, because words only make sense in their cultural background. Successful trademark translation should follow some certain principles.

A. Principle of Understanding Cultural Connotation

Due to many differences of ecological environment, history, religion, politics, economy and other aspects, different countries have different values and cultural characteristics, so as to it forms a different cultural environment. The environment is rooted in cultural habits. Psychological characteristics of people are often affected by it, thus people have different consumptive psychology. It is a precondition for successful trademark translation to understand the similarities and differences in different cultures. We must understand the internal differences of different cultures in various countries and avoid misunderstandings caused by cultural differences.

B. Principle of Easy to Pronounce and Remember

The name of a trademark should be as simple as possible to make it easy to remember. (Lv Huichun., 2010) It is an important principle that trademarks are so simple and clear to make people gifted with an extraordinary retentive memory. The name of some international famous trademarks are catchy in Chinese such as 耐克(Nike), 阿迪达斯(Adidas), 奔驰(Benz), 宝马(BMW), 奥迪(Audi) and so on. They are not only let Chinese people remember quickly, but also remember for a long time. Chinese brand name should be less than five words in translation and English brand name should not exceed three syllables. Trademark names should avoid the use of unfamiliar vocabulary. For example, "Head & Shoulder"(the name of a kind of shampoo) has been translated into "海伦仙度丝(Hai Lun Xian Du Si)", which is too long for customers to understand. But "海飞丝(Hai Fei Si)" is more vivid and refreshing than "海伦仙度丝(Hai Lun Xian Du Si)" for Chinese people.

C. *Principle of Combining Characteristics of Products*

The principle of combining the characteristics of products is the basic requirement in trademark translation. The brand name must conform to the nature of goods and embody the concept of commodity positioning, to accurately deliver productive information to consumers. For example, "Procter & Gamble", a trademark of the company, is translated as "宝洁(Bao Jie)" instead of "宝碱(Bao Jian)". This name can well reflect characteristics of healthy commodity in the company.

D. *Principle of Equivalence between Literal Meaning and Implied Meaning*

If you can not achieve perfection effect, should adhere to the "Dynamic Equivalence" principle. Nida, the famous translation theorist, put forward the concept of translation equivalence. He pointed out that each language has its inherent characteristics(Nida, 1993). In the process of the implementation of trademark translation, the form and connotation of a source language should be preserved to achieve the effect of it. Because of the differences between Chinese and British culture, it is necessary for trademark translation to respect the customs and language characteristics of different consumers.

E. *Principle of Paying Attention to Economic and Political Connotation*

In the process of trademark translation, translators will often encounter some political and economic words that have special meanings. Because of different cultural environment, these words may enable consumers think of unnecessary negative associations. In order to safeguard the dignity and interests of the states, and better promote friendly exchanges among the people of all countries, translators should have a certain understanding and grasp of political and economic policies of all countries.

III. TRADEMARK TRANSLATION WITH WORDS OF DIFFERENT ASSOCIATION

A. *Different Associations of Animal*

"Because of the different history and culture, there are lots of differences in the associations of animals and plants between China and English-speaking countries."(Long Lingyun, 2007, p.46) "孔雀(Kong Que)" is a brand name of Chinese color television. Chinese people associate peacock with beautiful and auspicious. So when we introduce "Peacock" color TV to China, Chinese people will form noble and elegant images in their minds. But in western countries, if we translate"孔雀(Kong Que)" into "Peacock", goods will not be favored by western people. Because "Peacock" has a hidden meaning and is universally considered to be an evil bird or a playboy. Therefore, there are "as proud as peacock" and "play the peacock" in English idioms (Liu Fagong,2003).

In Chinese traditional culture, "dragon" is a totem image. In order to express the belief and worship of "dragon" in daily life, Chinese people hold dragon boat races on the Dragon Boat Festival. As far as idioms of the dragon, they have happy and beautiful cultural connotation in Chinese learning. In western countries, however, because of the influence of Christian culture, western people think that "dragon" is a lizard with a long tail, two big wings, and it can breathe fire. Western dragon often equated with evil. Therefore, as a trademark, "dragon" will give unpleasant associations to western people.

There are a lot of examples of other animals. Bee represents the meaning of busy and diligent in Chinese. But it points an unpleasant creature in English culture. Eagle has associative meaning of hero in Chinese. But it means power and liberty in Western countries. Goat points people who has kind-hearted personality in Chinese, but represent the meaning of lecherous man in Western countries. Bat is a symbol of health and happiness in Chinese traditional customs, but it is always associated with dark forces in Western folk customs.

In addition to these, of course, there are many other examples. "大白兔(Da Bai Tu)" (candy) is a famous trademark in China. "Rabbit" is a symbol of longevity in China, but in western culture, especially in Australia, the local people do not love rabbits, because they destroy their grassland. "Bee" is a symbol of diligence and dedication in Chinese, but it mean objectionable stuff in Western countries; "Goat" is a symbol of gentle personality in Chinese, but is lecher in western countries; "Bat" is a symbol of health and happiness in Chinese traditional customs, but it has always been associated with the dark forces in Western folklore. (Lan Tiane,2014)

B. *Different Associations of Plants*

“松(pine)”, “竹(bamboo)”, and “梅(plum blossom)” in traditional culture Chinese called the m the three durable plants of winter. "pine, bamboo and plum blossom" are symbol of noble character, and are metaphor to faithful friendship, so “松(pine)”, “竹(bamboo)”, and “梅(plum blossom)” as a trademark word is very popular in China. Therefore "竹叶青" (beverage) and "梅花" (aginomoto) are successful examples. However, "pine", "bamboo" and "plum" are not considered in the western culture. In addition "Peony" and "Chrysanthemum" are very popular in China. The trademarks named for them can arouse people's positive associations. But in many European countries, people don't use chrysanthemums as gifts, because chrysanthemums with the meaning of death can make people think of graveyards.

C. *Different Associations of Colors*

Because of the great differences between English and Chinese cultures, the same color has very different associative meanings. In western countries, “Red” means danger, bloodshed and violence; “Yellow” means a yellow dog; “Blue” means obscene people; “Green” is used to indicate people who lack of training or experience, knowledge; “White” means pure and happy; “Black” have evil and sinister meaning in English. The same color does not have the same associative meaning in English or Chinese culture. In view of this, the two trademarks of “蓝天(Lan Tian)” and “白象(Bai Xiang)” can not be translated literally into "Blue Sky" and "White Elephant".

D. *Different Associations of Numeral*

Because of the similarity of thinking ways, people have same or similar association to the same number. There are many differences of natural environment, customs, religious belief and the way of thinking between English and Chinese national culture, to form different characteristics of national culture. Differences of culture make people have different associative emotions to the same number. However, the same number can product same or similar association.

Different ethnic groups have different favor and taboo of numbers. “Three”, “six”, “eight” and “nine” are favored by Chinese people. “Three” has associative meaning of lucky, noble, and auspicious. For example, “三九胃泰(drug)” is best-selling drugs in China. The associative meaning of “Six” is smooth going. “Eight” has associative meaning of fortune, because eight has same pronunciation with “发(Fa)”. For example, “八宝粥(porridge)” is a kind of delicious food in China. And the trademark name of “361 (sportswear)” is very popular in China. “Nine” has associative meaning of forever. Because it has similar pronunciation with “久(Jiu)”. The trademark name of “999 (medicine)” is an typical example in China. “Three”, “four”, and “seven” are favored by the Western people. “Three” is a perfect number for Western people. Because people believe that the world was made up by sky, earth and ocean in English culture. Because “four” and fair have same pronunciation. So “Four” has associative meaning of fair. “Seven” is a mysterious number for English people. Because they believe the world was created by God in seven days. So the trademark name of “7-up(beverage)” is a successful translation. But “four” is a bad number for Chinese people. Because “four” has same pronunciation with “死(Si)”. It will make people think of death. So Chinese trademark names don't use the number of “four”. “Thirteen” is not favored by the Western people. It is a taboo in the Western countries. Because it has associative meaning of ill omen in the Bible.

E. *Different Associations of Politics and Economy*

Politics and economy are two mainstream directions of the development of each country. Their position can not be infringed. Because of different politics and economic system, the cultural difference of each country is obvious. “小熊(Xiao Xiong)” is a Chinese children clothing trademark name. When it exported, its name was directly translated as “Little Bear”. Nevertheless, “bear” is a taboo word in the West. It is usually associated with bear market by people. Bear market means that stock market is depressed and dismal. This trademark name is translated without thinking about cultural factors. Accordingly this product would not be accepted by western consumers.

IV. TRADEMARK TRANSLATION UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

It is overwhelming that foreign trademarks rush into the domestic. We can see soar technology of Korea from “三星(Samsung)”, “乐金(LG)” and “现代(Hyundai)”. We know mightiness of America from “福特(Ford)”, “劳斯莱斯(Rolls-Royce)”, “凯迪拉克(Cadillac)” and “科勒(KOHLER)”; We also perceive mystery of Japan from “松下(Panasonic)”, “东芝(TOSHIBA)”, “丰田(TOYOTA)” and “三菱(MITSUBISHI)”; We approve the advance of Germany from “奔驰(Benz)”, “保时捷(Porsche)” and “西门子(Siemens)” These trademarks not only make us know well-know trademarks but also appreciate foreign culture and international amorous feelings. Before putting products into the market, foreign producers have deep thought of trademarks translation, to cater Chinese consumers' consumption psychology.

A. *Differences of Individual Thoughts*

Foreign trademark names have characteristics of Western culture obviously. Many of them derived from the Greek Roman mythology, the Bible, modern literature and historic names of people and place. China is an ancient country with five-thousand-year cultural history. Chinese culture has thick oriental characteristics, different from western

culture. There is one more point, on account of different thoughts, people have individual consumer psychology.

Poison, is a trademark name of exotic perfume. The meaning of poison in English is toxicant. This trademark name show us a kind of reverse thinking. According to the foreign market research, experts found that western women pursuit wildness and adventure. Producers use an extreme word to reflect the characteristics of it. The products develop the sale market by its unique idea of trademark. However, in Chinese traditional customs, women pursuit wildness and adventure rarely. So before it was explored into the Chinese sales market, producers translated "Poison" into "百爱神 (Bai Ai Shen)" in Chinese to obey the cultural habits of Chinese consumers.

In the Han culture, people always pay attention to humility and calm steady character. And Chinese expression of sexual relation is euphemism. A kind of cosmetics' trademark name is "Kiss-Me". It successfully helps people associate with charm and sex appeal of women. Nevertheless, most women in China is not open enough to accept other people's praise about "You are really sexy" with smile at present. It is translated as "奇士美(Qi Shi Mei)" instead of "吻我(Wen Wo)". Because implicative expression of sex and love are advocated by Chinese ethnic peoples.

Chinese thoughts are deeply influenced by confucian culture. It makes Chinese people have conservative ideas and personality. However, western people advocate freedom and openness. So different people affect the translation of trademarks.

B. Differences of Social Customs

Social customs is cultural norms naturally forming in the long-term joint labor and common life. Although without very strong blinding, it restricts people's words, actions, and ideas etc. Different social customs have a great influence on the translation of trademarks. You should have comprehensive analysis and investigation of life style and customs of advertising target market before doing trademark translation. Otherwise, it will have a negative impact to products' image and sales. Such as "利(Li)", "九(Jiu)", "福(Fu)", "宝(Bao)" and "好(Hao)" were deeply loved by Chinese people. Generally speaking, this is auspicious words what Chinese called. Therefore, some foreign trademark translation also pay attention to this aspect. Trademark names like "家乐福" (CARREFOUR), "美特好"(MEET ALL), "吉利"(JILI), "徐福记"(Xv Fu's) and "999 感冒灵(Gan Mao Ling)".

C. Differences of Religious Belief

Different nations have different religious beliefs which have their own taboos. There are many typical examples to show differences of Chinese and English religious beliefs in trademark translation. For example, lions have positive meaning in English and they are king of beasts in western Fairy Tales. Lion is the symbol of courage and solemn in British. Lion also is the symbol of mighty in China. It is can be said that there is few differences between Chinese and English culture of lion. However, the trademark name of "GOLDLION" was translated into "金狮(Jin Shi)" in the beginning. Chinese pursue long life without old age and avoid death under the influence of Taoism and Buddhism. Because "金狮(Jin Shi)" has same pronunciation with "今失(Jin Shi)" and "今死(Jin Shi)", so it was translated into "金利来(Jin Li Lai)" later. (Pan Hongyan,2010)There is no doubt that it will be consistent with national culture and people's psychology.

V. PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATION IN CHINESE AND ENGLISH TRADEMARKS

Firstly, translated names do not conform to the cultural connotation. When Chinese products exported abroad, it is ignored the differences of culture, so that products are not welcomed by foreign people. For example, "帆船(Fan Chuan)", the trademark name of carpet was translated into "Junk". But Junk not only means sailing shape, but also means waste or castoff in English. So if translated like that, no one will pay attention to it(Xia Yong, 2010). Some Chinese trademark names have good images and symbols in Chinese. But translated directly, some will have completely opposite associated meaning. "金龙(Jin Long)" was translated into "Golden Dragon" literally, it will have evil meaning in western people's eyes.

Secondly, translated names are not very elegant. Some Chinese trademark names not all can be translated literally. Because all kinds of associative meanings are different in Sino-British culture. The meaning of force and fierce is associated with tigers in China, but it is associated with lions in the west. So we must find out no adverse associated meaning in western culture when translate trademark names about animals. Otherwise, it will affect the export of Chinese products.

Thirdly, the trademark names translated depend on pronunciation of words. Some of translated words have bad meaning. The Chinese phonetic alphabet of a trademark probably have same bad meaning with an English word. When translating Chinese trademark names, translators must pay attention to bad associated meaning of some Chinese phonetic alphabets and English words. For example, "茉莉花(Mo Li Hua)", Chinese famous tea, was exported to Europe, America, and Southeast Asian countries, but not popular in Hong Kong. Because the pronunciation of "茉莉(Mo Li)" is same like "没利(Mo Li)". (Xia Yong, 2010)This is a typical example of the bad associated meaning of trademark words.

VI. STRATEGIES OF TRANSLATION IN CHINESE AND ENGLISH TRADEMARKS

Successful trademark translations should adapt to national culture and respect national feelings. They need to properly express intrinsic meaning of products and accurately reflect quality of products. This requires translators not only to retain mental sharpness but also sensitive cultural awareness. According to the principles of trademark translation, we can use appropriate methods and techniques to make target language appropriate and accurate without losing source language culture, to promote consumption and improve enterprises' images and interests.

A. *Transliteration*

Transliteration is divided into direct transliteration and homophonic transliteration.

Direct transliteration means the method according to the pronunciation of Chinese and English trademark names. Many of Chinese trademarks are based on the method of direct transliteration. For example: beer trademarks YANJING(燕京) and YUNGANG(云冈); sports brands LINING(李宁) and ANTA(安踏); skin care product trademarks MAXAM(美加净) and RISECS(伊贝诗); food and beverage trademarks WA HA HA (娃哈哈) and Jianlibao (健力宝); tobacco trademarks HONGTA(红塔) and MAOTAI(茅台). There are many English trademarks which are based on the method of direct transliteration, such as 摩托罗拉(Motorola), 飞利浦(PHILIPS), 西门子(SIEMENS), 柯达(Kodak), 迪斯尼(Disney), 奥迪(Audi), 捷安特(Giant) and 诺基亚(NOKIA) and other classic examples.

Homophonic translation refers to using the words' meaning of auspicious to group words. In order to adapt to customers' cultural and psychological orientation. In addition, "Clean & Clear", a kind of skin care products, is a typical example. English trademark name was translated into "可伶可俐(Ke Ling Ke Li)" instead of "干净清爽(Gan Jing Qing Shuang)". Customers not only can easily associate it with clean and fresh skin, but also remind people of image of clever and sensible girls. So this product is more popular with young girls. Another example, a trademark name of sports shoes is "PEAK", translated it into "匹克(Pi Ke)". The clever translator use "奥林匹克运动会(The Olympic Games)" to trigger people's thinking. And for example, the English trademark name of "乐凯(Le Kai)" is "Lucky". It was translated using homophonic translation method. This film name is not only easy to remember, but also pleasant to hear. This trademark name translation caters to the psychology of consumers in the English-speaking countries. Because of the meaning of "Lucky" is auspicious, it can quickly grasp the customers' attention. We should avoid using some of Chinese words of taboo. It just likes "死(Si)、败(Bai)" etc.

B. *Free Translation*

Free translation is the method of trademark translation from the meaning of trademark words without considering pronunciation of words. The free translation method is usually used for the basically same cultural connotation. For instant, "Forget-Me-Not", a trademark name of perfume, is translated into "勿忘我(Wu Wang Wo)".(Zhu Yifei, 2008) Other examples of English trademark free translation are "Shell", "Microsoft", "APPLE", "Nestle", and "PLAY BOY". "Microsoft", the trademark of computer software company, is free translated into "微软(Wei Ruan)". "Apple", the trademark name of computer, is free translated into "苹果(Ping Guo)". "Shell", the trademark name of oil, is free translated into "壳牌(Ke Pai)". "PLAY BOY", the trademark of magazine and daily necessities, is free translated into "花花公子(Hua Hua Gong Zi)". "Nestle", the trademark of coffee and foods, is free translated into "雀巢(Que Chao)". Other example, the trademark name of British jewelry is "Blue Dolphin", is free translated into "蓝海豚(Lan Hai Tun)". "Walk Man" electric appliances are free translated into "随身听(Sui Shen Ting)". The translation of "Walk Man" is apt to nature and the meaning of it is more comprehensive than its English trademark name. There are many examples of using free translation to translate Chinese trademark. "长城(Chang Cheng)" lubricating oil is free translated into "Great Wall". "永久(Yong Jiu)" bicycle is translated into "Forever" using free translation. "熊猫(Xiong Mao)" electric appliance is free translated into "Panda". "王朝(Wang Chao)" wine is free translated into "Dynasty".

C. *Non-translation*

Some trademark names of simple letters, Arabic numbers or symbols can not be translated. This situation can be divided into three categories. Firstly, some trademark names consist of a few letters, numbers, or symbols. The meaning of them is clear at a glance. It is easy to understand, so we do not need to translate it. Such as British fashion women's U' db. Secondly, some English trademark names are translated by abbreviating initial letters of each words. For example, "Christian Dior" is world famous cosmetic trademark. Chinese people generally call it CD, although it can be translated as "迪奥(Di Ao)". And "Calvin Klein" is fashion trademark of America. People generally call it CK. Thirdly, some internationally well-known trademarks do not have to be translated, especially which having long history and top level. Such as Max Mara etc. Foreign trademark names translated using non-translation method are "IBM (computer)" and "555 (cigarette)" etc. Chinese trademark names translated using non-translation method are "TCL (electrical equipment)", "999 (medicine)", "HTC (mobile phone)" and "VV (soymilk)" etc.

VII. CONCLUSION

On this day, Chinese and western cultures exchange rapidly and vigorously. Trademark translation is a complicated cross-cultural communication activity. Trademark translation is not only the translation on the language level, but also a

kind of translation of culture. In this paper, the importance of trademark names translation was emphasized through the analysis of excellent and failed examples. We must pay attention to cultural differences in translation of trademarks and pronunciation and memorize of trademark names, reflecting products' characteristics. There are lots of methods concluded in trademark name translation that we can use to achieve successful trademark translation.

Trademark name translation is not easy transformation from one language to another. It is often related to different cultural traditions and psychological differences of customers caused by differences of culture. Trademark translation is one of intercultural translations. Translators need to stand on a level of intercultural translations and have observant awareness of cross culture. At the same time, they need to respect every ethnic customs and use correct methods and skills of translation to make trademarks into customers hearts. Thereby, manufacturers can promote consumption and improve the interests of enterprises.

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The Effect of Teaching Critical Thinking on Iranian EFL Learners' Essay Writing

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Abstract—The present study made an attempt to determine the effect of teaching critical thinking skills on Iranian EFL learners' essay writing ability. To do this, a sample of 60 EFL learners was selected based on their performance on Preliminary English Test (PET). The participants were randomly assigned to two equal groups of control and experimental. An essay-writing test functioning as pre-test was administered on both groups in order to ensure their homogeneity in terms of writing ability. The groups received 10 sessions of writing instruction; however, experimental group received additional instruction and practice regarding the techniques of critical thinking. Finally, both groups took an essay writing posttest in order to compare their writing achievements. Both pretest and posttest were scored by two raters using TOEFL rating scales. The results of paired and independent sample t-tests showed that critical thinking techniques significantly enhanced EFL learners writing ability.

Index Terms—critical thinking, writing ability, essay writing

I. INTRODUCTION

Socio-affective, cognitive and meta-cognitive variables have a remarkable effect on learners' learning (O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Russo, & Kupper, 1985). It seems that cognitive factors have a profound effect on the quality of learning in students and, also they can deepen the process of understanding the concepts and solving the problems.

It is believed that the art of teaching is encouraging the students to challenge the problems and find suitable solution for them. In this regard, cognitive strategies are very compatible with engaging learner's mind in this process. In recent years, numerous studies are carried out on learners' cognitive skills as well as the strategies which are utilized by learners in foreign and second language learning (Brown, 2000). One of the cognitive skills is critical thinking that is defined as "self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking" (Paul & Elder, 2005, p. 1). "In other words, critical thinking is an active, purposeful, organized, cognitive process we use to carefully examine our thinking and the thinking of others in order to clarify and improve our understanding" (Chaffee, p. 1988).

Paul and Elder (2005) underlined critical thinking and believed that critical thinking is a process by which critical thinkers improve the quality of their thinking by imposing intellectual standards upon it. Halpern (1998) has defined critical thinking as "thinking that is purposeful, reasoned, and goal directed. It is the kind of thinking involved in solving problems, formulating inferences, calculating likelihoods, and making decisions" (p. 5). While Halpern (1998) does use the term critical thinking, most cognitive-based theorists have preferred to use "thinking skills" (or, more narrowly, higher order thinking skills) rather than critical thinking as a generic term for the movement (Lewis & Smith, 1993; Sternberg, 1987).

Although there is a wealth of definitions given for critical thinking, they are lacking in comprehensiveness. Educators have long acknowledged the importance of the term in educational settings. Sezer (2008) holds that critical thinking is the process of actively and skillfully analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating information. Wade (1995) identified eight features of critical thinkers:

Critical thinkers involve in asking questions, defining a problem, examining evidence, analyzing assumptions and biases, avoiding emotional reasoning, avoiding oversimplification, considering other interpretations, and tolerating ambiguity.

Benesch (1999) believed that when we shift to a critical thinker, we enhance awareness that prevents us to utilize fast and fix solution. Indeed, critical thinking is not a harmless academic exchange, but a political discussion with serious implications about what should and should not be taught in EAP and L2 composition classes and in developing any program the teacher selects certain aspects of content knowledge which will enable students to gain access to the cultural and linguistic practices. Also, Atkinson (1997) makes a distinction between critical and uncritical thinkers in this perspective that uncritical thinkers let some incongruous factors interfere their thoughts and actions, but critical thinkers do not let it happen. He claims that two equally talented persons, although would be homogeneous regarding their talent and knowledge, surely would be different in thinking critically at analyzing and evaluating options and

alternatives. In other words, critical thinkers would be a better problem solvers and decision makers. Similarly, Gelder (2003) makes a distinction between critical and uncritical thinker and states critical thinker knows that if somebody presents a reason to accept a position, that reason probably involves unstated assumptions which should be exposed and questioned in a systematic way.

An individual thinking critically uses the scientific method to understand the ordinary world. This is true because critical thinking mimics the well-known method of scientific investigation: a question is identified, a hypothesis is formulated, relevant data are gathered, the hypothesis is logically tested and evaluated, and eliciting a reliable conclusion from the result (Stapleton, 2002; Angeli & Valanides, 2009, as cited in Malmir & Shoorcheh, 2012). Critical thinking entails the principles of scientific method and is an essential tool of inquiry in education. Therefore, educators put an emphasis on teaching critical thinking skills in language classrooms where learners have the chance to express themselves, evaluate others' judgments and ask questions at high levels.

Hay (2007) knows critical thinking as the only eminent reason for teaching literature, because it teaches students to read and think more critically. He believes that although thinking is amazingly hard, it is the most rewarding thing we can devote our time to. Malmir and Shoorcheh (2012) investigated the effect of critical thinking on Iranian advanced EFL learners' speaking ability. They provided critical thinking techniques in addition to routine techniques for writing instruction for experimental group. They found that those students who received instruction on critical thinking strategies outperformed on the oral interview post-test and general speaking ability.

Writing in a foreign language has proved to be a complex skill which needs special attention in EFL teaching and learning. Because of complexity of the writing process, it is difficult to envisage a model for writing in term of its 'sub-skill' (see Abbott & Berninger, 1993; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996, for an attempt to arrive at such a model). Most existing writing models focus on the writing process (Chenoweth & Hayes, 2001; Flower & Hayes, 1980; Hayes, 1996; Kellogg, 1996) or on the development of writing proficiency (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987) more than on the characteristic of the cognitive and linguistic resources needed for writing. Through applying metacognitive teaching (in which the teacher is a facilitator of knowledge and the students are problem solvers and in charge of their learning) and hands-on/minds (in which students generate ideas and are provided with freedom to be physically active in their search of knowledge), Hay (2007) provided evidence that these strategies have the potential to activate students in a dynamic learning environment and can positively impact the range, quantity and quality of students' critical thinking. More surprisingly, as a result of using these strategies students could define, analyze, and evaluate their life events thoroughly.

"Writing and critical thinking are seen as closely linked, and expertise in writing is seen as an indication that students have mastered the cognitive skills required for university work" (Weigle, 2002, p. 5). Writing is claimed to be a higher form of critical thinking as well as a problem solving activity where a combination of various skills are tapped. Clearly writing proficiently necessitates gaining thinking and reasoning skills. Freely and Steinberg (2000) stress the significance of discussions, debates and problem solving activities to foster critical thinking in students.

Khodabakhsh, Jahandar and Khodabandehlou (2013) conducted a study to investigate the effect of critical thinking tasks on paragraph writing ability of Iranian EFL learners. After selecting a homogenous sample of the participants, they were assigned to two groups of control and experimental. The experimental group received special treatment with critical thinking tasks. Using ANCOVA, it was found that critical thinking tasks could significantly improve the paragraph writing ability of EFL learners.

Writing has been used as a strategy by teachers to improve conceptual learning and to help students organize their thoughts. Due to the lack of familiarity with appropriate strategies, most of learners have profound problems and passive role in writing process. Critical thinking is one of the cognitive strategies that let the learners wear the dependency of teachers and make them active in writing process. But, it has not been given sufficient attention by language teachers and researchers.

This study is also designed based on the motivation to apply the techniques of critical thinking into writing classroom and provide a dynamic learning situation. The following research question was posed to address the purpose of the study:

Does teaching critical thinking skills have any significant effect on the development of Iranian EFL learners' essay writing?

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A. Sample Preparation

The researchers selected a random sample of 60 out of 90 newly employed personnel of oil and Gas Company in Asaluyeh, Iran. They were male and female native speaker of Persian holding B.S and M.S degrees. Concerning the purpose of the study, the participants needed to be familiar with the aspects of cognitive strategies and in order to apply the principles of critical thinking, therefore they were selected from those who were supposed to be at the intermediate level of language proficiency. The age of the participants ranged from 23 to 30. They were homogenized based on their performance on Preliminary English Test (PET) whose mean and standard deviation were 46.13 and 10.09 respectively. They were randomly assigned into two groups of control and experimental.

B. Procedures

According to Cambridge ESOL Examination, PET was compatible to investigate learners' proficiency level. The Preliminary English Test (PET) was used to determine the learner's homogeneity and to show whether the learners' knowledge of English is at the same level. It has four sections (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking). The listening section has four parts and the participants listened to each part twice, so for each part of the test, the participants had time to look through the questions and check their answers. It included 25 questions. The reading section has five parts and includes 35 questions. The writing section had 2 parts. The participants were supposed to write a paragraph in order to measure composition skills in standard written English. The speaking section included 4 parts which were designed to elicit a wide range of speaking skills from the candidates.

To measure the quality of the participants' writing before treatment, a pre-test on English writing was used. The participants of both groups took writing pre-test in order to ensure their homogeneity in terms of writing ability. They were required to write an English composition on one topic *some people think that strict punishments for driving offences are the key to reducing traffic accidents. Others, however, believe that other measures would be more effective in improving road safety.* Within 45 minutes during regular class time. This topic was thus chosen for writing so that the students would not feel too difficult and could display their English writing ability. The composition should be no less than 250 English words. A similar version of this test was used at the end of the study as posttest. The one topic of the posttest was about *the pros and cons of watching television.* The pretest and posttest were corrected and scored by two raters. The mean of two raters' scores were considered as final score of the participants.

A pilot study was undertaken to find out the agreement between the two raters. The number of participants in the pilot study was of 20 and inter-rater correlation obtained was .83 with Sig. of .00 demonstrating a perfect agreement between the two raters. The selected two raters judged the writing tasks according to the rating criteria of TOEFL Rating Scale of Writing. TOEFL writing rating scale is a criterion with maximum of 6 and minimum of 0. The criteria are specified as follows:

- Score 6 demonstrates clear competence in writing on both the rhetorical and syntactic levels, though it may have occasional errors.
- Score 5 demonstrates competence in writing on both the rhetorical and syntactic levels, though it probably has occasional errors.
- Score 4 demonstrates minimal competence in writing on both the rhetorical and syntactic levels.
- Score 3 demonstrates some developing competence in writing, but it remains flawed on either the rhetorical or syntactic level, or both.
- Score 2 demonstrates serious disorganization or underdevelopment—little or no detail, or irrelevant specifics.
- Score 1 demonstrates a piece of writing that is incoherent and may be undeveloped and contain severe and persistent writing errors

After administering the Preliminary English Test (PET), 60 students who obtained the criterion were randomly assigned to two equal groups of control and experimental. The participants of both groups take writing pre-test in order to ensure their homogeneity in terms of writing ability. Then, both groups received 10 sessions of writing instruction. In the experimental group, 20 minutes of every session was allocated to provide the techniques of critical thinking such as problem solving activities, raising questions, teaching logical reasoning, evaluating others' arguments regarding their writing. Then, the principles of essay writing were taught and a topic was given to the participants for writing. Every student had the opportunity to express his/her opinions on the proposed topics and practice critical thinking skills. In control group, the common techniques of writing instruction were provided for the learners. The topics given to the learners were similar to those of experimental group. Finally, the participants of both groups were asked to write an essay on the proposed topic functioning as the posttest of the study.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data were collected and submitted to statistical analyses using SPSS 21.0 in order to pursue the purpose of the study. PET was administered among 80 EFL learners at the beginning of study. The descriptive statistics of the obtained scores (such as mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum and skewedness) on each of the measured skills as well as their total score on PET are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1.
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE SCORES OBTAINED FROM PET

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewedness
Proficiency test	80	21	74	46.13	10.09	.108

Too distant scores from below and above the mean were omitted in order to homogenize the participants regarding their level of language proficiency. In this case, 20 learners were excluded from the main analysis. The descriptive statistics of selected scores are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2.
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF HOMOGENIZED PARTICIPANTS

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewedness
Proficiency test	60	36	56	49.12	4.33	.077

Regardless of participants' obtained scores on the PET, they were randomly assigned to two groups of control and experimental. Pretest was administered on the participants of both groups in order to check their pre-knowledge of writing at the beginning of the study. Each English writing task was scored independently by two experienced teacher according to TOEFL rating scale. The descriptive statistics related to the pretest scores are shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3.
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF GROUPS' PERFORMANCE ON PRETEST

		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	
Pretest	Experimental	Rater 1	30	0	2.5	2.17	2.30
		Rater 2	30	1	2	2.13	2.37
	Control	Rater 1	30	1	2	2.70	2.89
		Rater 2	30	1	2	2.87	2.01

A Pearson-product moment correlation coefficient was performed in order to test the inter-rater reliability of scores on pretest given by two raters in two groups of the study. The results of correlation for control and experimental groups, as the Table 4 shows, confirmed that there is a significant relationship between the scores of pretest given by two raters in both experimental and control groups. Thus, the inter-rater reliability of scores was acceptable.

TABLE 4.
INTER-RATER RELIABILITY OF THE GROUPS ON PRETEST

		Pretest (Rater 1)
Control Group/Pretest (Rater 2)	Pearson Correlation	.985**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Experimental Group/Pretest (Rater 2)	Pearson Correlation	.935**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
N		30

The mean (arithmetic average) of two sets of pretest writing scores for both experimental and control groups was calculated as shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5.
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF CONTROL AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUP ON PRETEST

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest experimental (Mean)	30	.50	2	2.15	2.325
Pretest control (Mean)	30	1	2	2.78	1.941

As mean of the scores in Table 5 shows, little differences were found between the scores of two sets of raters of writing pretest. The data collected from the participants' pretests and posttests were analyzed quantitatively to answer the questions addressed in the study.

In order to find the effects of treatment on the learners, both control and experimental groups received a writing posttest. Like pretest, similar statistical analyses are provided in order to test the null hypothesis of the study. The descriptive statistics of groups' performance on posttest is presented in Table 6.

TABLE 6.
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF GROUPS' PERFORMANCE ON POSTTEST

		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	
Posttest	Experimental	Rater 1	30	2	5	3.68	2.37
		Rater 2	30	2	4.5	3.80	2.53
	Control	Rater 1	30	1.5	3	2.50	2.15
		Rater 2	30	1	3	2.53	2.04

The inter-rater reliability of the control and experimental group's performance on posttest was calculated by means of Pearson correlation. The results of statistical analysis are provided in Table 7.

TABLE 7.
INTER-RATER RELIABILITY OF THE CONTROL AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS ON POSTTEST

		Pretest (Rater 1)
Control Group/Posttest (Rater 2)	Pearson Correlation	.989**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Experimental Group/Posttest (Rater 2)	Pearson Correlation	.993**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
N		30

The results suggested a strong and significant correlation between two raters' scores on posttest scores of both groups. The mean of two raters' scores on posttest of each group was considered for final analysis.

In order to test the null hypothesis of the study in finding whether teaching critical thinking skills has any significant impact on Iranian EFL learners' essay ability, a paired sample t-test was performed between the pretest and posttest

scores of experimental group whose participants received critical thinking techniques. The results are provided in Table 8.

TABLE 8.
PAIRED SAMPLES T-TEST BETWEEN PRETEST AND POSTTEST OF EXPERIMENTAL GROUP

Pair 1	Posttest– Pretest	Mean	Std. D	Std. Error Mean	T	df	Sig.
		1.59	1.47	.26	2.9	29	.00

The results of paired samples t-test indicated that there is a significant difference ($t = 2.92, p < .05$) between the participants of the experimental group's performance on pretest and posttest. In other words, the critical thinking skills caused learners' progress in writing ability.

Furthermore, an independent sample t-test was performed between the posttest scores of control and experimental groups. The results are provided in Table 9.

TABLE 9.
INDEPENDENT SAMPLES TEST BETWEEN CONTROL AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS ON POSTTEST

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	F		t	Df	Sig.	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
	F	Sig.					
Posttest	1.64	.20	3.30	58	.00	1.75	1.10

The results, as shown in Table 9, showed that there is a significant difference between the posttest scores of both control and experimental groups ($t = 6.82, p < .05$) in such a way that experimental group outperformed on posttest. In other words, the findings of this study confirmed the significant difference between the two groups. Thus, due to the findings of this study, we can deduce that the critical thinking can improve essay writing ability of EFL learners.

The results of the study were consistent with the general view of the contribution of cognitive strategies to improving language skills and the positive effect of critical thinking on other language skills, especially writing, was analyzed in recent decades. Assadi, Davatgar and Jafari (2013) in a study tried to find out the effect of critical thinking on Iranian EFL learners' writing improvement. The findings showed that writing performance of participants was affected by critical thinking instruction. Soleimani and Kazazi (2014) examined the impact of critical thinking on writing of the learners of teaching English as a foreign language, TEFL, students in Tehran Payame Noor University. The results of the study demonstrated that critical thinking had a statistically significant effect on TEFL students' writing. Because there is a close relationship between reading and writing skill, (Winterowd, 2000) and as far as this study was concerned, critical thinking can enhance EFL learners' writing skill as well as reading.

Some other studies were not in line with the present research. For instance, in the study reported here, the critical thinking and writing experiences of 34 registered nurses in an online course at an Ontario university were considered from several perspectives: perception of writing competence; demonstration of levels and kinds of critical thinking; and demonstration of writing competence. Although the participants' perceptions of their writing competence increased significantly, these results were not reflected in their levels of writing competence when compared to that of younger nurse-learners and students in an Arts course at the university. The study did not demonstrate that online writing results in different levels of critical thinking; it did, however, suggest a connection between and among online writing, different kinds of critical thinking, and assignment design (Carter, 2008). Emilia (2010) reported a study in striving for detecting students' ability and difficulty in writing an English undergraduate thesis at a state university of Indonesia. The article placed emphasis on the students' ability and difficulties in writing a data presentation and discussion chapter, which are related to critical capacity looked at in this study. The paper started with a brief introduction, which provided the background and the theories underlying the study. It was followed by an account of the methodology, in which it is argued that the study used a case study method, particularly text analysis (Travers, 2001) and involved nine theses selected randomly and analyzed on the basis of the elements of a conventional research report (Thody, 2006) and the Transitivity system of systemic functional grammar, developed by Halliday (1994). The paper then specified the results, revealing that despite their good control in the discourse semantic level, students in general still needed a lot of guidance and assistance in writing a data presentation and discussion chapter. Fahim and Hashtroudi (2012) investigated to find out whether or not teaching techniques of critical thinking could effect on Iranian EFL university students' argumentative essays. 63 university students of Islamic Azad university aged of 21 studying translation participated in the study. The selected participants were those fallen within two SD above and below the mean on TOEFL. They were demanded to write a two-paragraph argumentative essays at the onset of the semester and then after 6 sessions. Treatment was delivered to the experimental group. The students' essays were scored on the basis of Unrau's scoring guide by two English teachers. The finding of the study showed that techniques of critical thinking can improve students' critical thinking and cannot contribute them to write more argumentative essays.

IV. CONCLUSION

The present study conducted through using the critical thinking techniques and writing test, was an attempt to verify the effect of critical thinking on essay writing ability. As the result of posttest scores revealed, teaching writing while

using cognitive strategies, especially critical thinking, would lead to better learning among EFL learners. Indeed, the critical thinkers tend to devote more time to decide and analyze the validity of information and argument based on possible evidences and reasons during writing. Engaging students more deeply in the process of writing through critical thinking can have the positive and effective consequences for EFL learners.

The result of the study can carry implications for EFL teachers and syllabus designers in this regard. First, in order to understand more profoundly, teachers and syllabus designers should expose EFL learners to critical thinking principles at the beginning of the education. Second, it is recommended that teachers fit cognitive strategies into the curriculum to avoid any misunderstanding for EFL learners, because the level of cognitive strategies should be compatible with syllabus design.

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A Cross-cultural Comparative Analysis of Sino-American Family Conflicts Management

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Abstract—Based on Culture Dimension Theory, the author explores the dynamic factors causing family conflicts by observing and analyzing the behaviors in the episodes of the sitcoms *Modern Family* and *Home with Kids*. This paper attempts to answer two basic research questions: How do Chinese and American people deal with family conflicts? Is there any similarity or difference in the family conflicts of the two cultures? The paper compares the Sino-American family conflicts in three aspects: the cultural value context and the cultural reason leading to the conflicts; the conflict management styles being resorted to by the two families; and the changes and new findings in the conflict management strategies of two families. Through the comparative analysis on family conflict from two cultural contexts, the author is not only going to address the similarities and differences in family conflicts and conflict management strategies in those two cultures, but to explore whether different behaviors are driven by different cultures and values or not. Furthermore, through this cross-cultural comparative analysis, it would be helpful to understand globalization and integration and to avoid misunderstandings or conflicts in intercultural communication.

Index Terms—cross cultural comparison, culture dimension theory, family conflict, conflict management strategies

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the long history of human development, each civilization derives from certain family education concepts with national features. Based on sharp different ideology and cultural tradition, Chinese and American family culture bear different values with distinct features. Conflict has been a popular theme in the study of cross-cultural communication and it is frequently explored by domestic and foreign scholars. Family conflicts exist in everyone's life no matter which culture he/she comes from. Therefore, the research of family conflict is worthy receiving more and more attention from cross-cultural communication scholars. In this thesis, two TV series *Home with Kids* and *Modern Family* are cited to explore the differences of family conflicts management between China and America, expecting it can work as a reference for Chinese family education as well as promote the social and cultural exchanges between China and America.

II. CULTURE DIMENSION THEORY

Geert Hofstede (2001) put forward Cultural Dimensions by doing a ten-year quantitative research. This model was developed based on data collected from an extensive IBM database for which 116000 questionnaires were used in 50 countries and in 20 languages. By conducting various and numerous cultural and academic activities in many different countries, Hofstede is regarded as one of the leading representatives of intercultural studies. The findings of his research and his theoretical ideas provide an excellent summary of the relationship between cultural values and social behaviors, and are used worldwide in both academic and professional management studies. The six culture dimensions are introduced as follows:

Individualism-Collectivism: Individualism is the most important pattern in the United States. Individualism manifests itself in individual initiative, independence, individual expression and privacy. Collectivism is characterized by a rigid social framework that distinguishes between in-groups and out-groups. (Hofstede,2001)

Power Distance: It describes the distribution of influence within the culture, the extent to which the members of a society accept that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally. People in a large degree of Power Distance societies accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place which needs no further justification. People in small Power Distance societies strive for power equalization and demand justification for power inequalities. (Hofstede,2001)

Uncertainty Avoidance: It deals with a society's tolerance for ambiguity people will endure and how much risk they like to take, and it involves the extent to which a culture would avoid or tolerate uncertainty. Strong Uncertainty Avoidance societies maintain rigid codes of belief and behavior and are intolerant towards deviant persons and ideas. Weak Uncertainty Avoidance societies maintain a more relaxed atmosphere in which practice counts more than

principles and deviance is more easily tolerated. (Hofstede,2001)

Masculinity-Femininity: This dimension measures a culture's dominant values ranging from aggressive masculine traits to nurturing feminine traits. Masculinity stands for a preference in society for achievement, power, possessions, heroism, assertiveness, and material success. on the contrary, Femininity stands for a preference for relationships, nurturance, modesty, caring for the weak, and the quality of life. (Hofstede,2001)

Long-term orientation versus short-term orientation: The time-orientation dimension refers to a person's point of reference about life and work. Cultures that promote a long-term orientation value social norms, traditions and long-range goals, and admire persistence, thriftiness, humility, a sense of shame, and status differences within interpersonal relationships. Cultures that promote a short-term orientation toward changing events, on the other hand, have a deep appreciation for tradition, personal steadiness and stability, maintaining the "face" of self and others, giving and receiving gifts and favors and immediate gratification of one's needs. (Hofstede,2001)

Indulgence-Restraint: Indulgence stands for a society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human needs related to enjoying life and having fun. Restraint stands for a society that suppresses gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms. (Hofstede,2001)

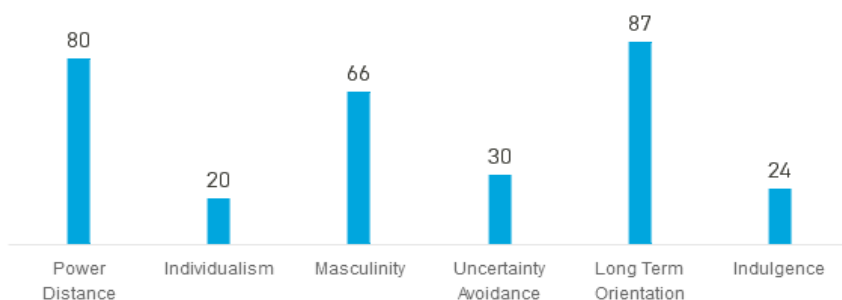


Figure 1. Values of Six Culture Dimensions of China

By exploring the Chinese culture through the values of Six Culture Dimensions, we can get a good summary of the deep drivers of Chinese culture compared to other world cultures. From figure 1, it's easy to conclude that Chinese culture can be classified into a collectivist, high-power distance, masculine, low uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation and restraint one. China sits in the higher ranking of power distance index at 80, and China is a society that believes that inequalities amongst people are acceptable. The subordinate-superior relationship tends to be polarized and there is no defense against power abuse by superiors. China is a highly collectivist culture with a score of 20, where people's behaviors are mostly driven by the interests of the group rather than themselves. China is a Masculine society with a score of 66 –success oriented and driven, which exemplifies the fact that many Chinese will sacrifice family and leisure time to work in order to pursue success. China has a low score on Uncertainty Avoidance. Chinese people have a high tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity; Chinese language is full of ambiguous meanings that can be difficult for Western people to follow; Chinese are adaptable and entrepreneurial. With a score of 87, China is classified into long-term orientation, which means that it is a very pragmatic culture. In a pragmatic culture, Chinese people value social norms and traditions, and admire persistence, thriftiness, humility, and a sense of shame. Social distinctions between elder and younger siblings are common, deferred gratification of needs is widely accepted, and family life is guided by shared tasks. With a low score of 24, China is a restrained society in this dimension, where people usually try to suppress their own needs and regulate them by keeping strict social traditions and norms.

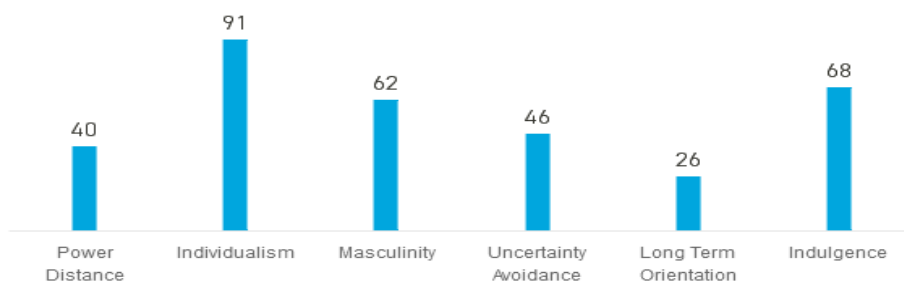


Figure 2. Values of Six Culture Dimensions of United States

Figure 2 clearly illustrates that American culture can be classified into an individualistic, low-power distance, masculine, low uncertainty avoidance, short-term orientation and indulgent one. With a fairly low score of 40 on Power Distance and a fairly high score of 91 on Individualism, America boasts a culture value that believe in the importance of

minimizing social or class inequalities, questioning or challenging authority figures, reducing hierarchical organizational structures, and using power only for legitimate purposes. American people put more emphasis on independence, privacy, self, and decisions are usually made on the basis of what is good for the individual, not for the group. Similar to China, the US scores 62 on Masculinity, which can be seen in the typical American behavioral patterns. With a low score of 46 on Uncertainty Avoidance, Americans tend to be more tolerant of different ideas or opinions and allow the freedom of expression, so their communication styles tend to be direct and straightforward. The United States scores normative on the fifth dimension with a low score of 26, which strengthens the fact that Americans are very practical, being reflected by the “can-do” mentality. At 68, the United States scores as an indulgent society on the sixth dimension, which is reflected by the contradictory attitudes and behavior---Work hard and play hard.

The two figures demonstrate the respective values of six culture dimensions of China and United States, which provide a solid reference for the author to analyze and compare the family education and conflicts management strategies adopted by Sino-American families.

III. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ON FAMILY EDUCATION CONCEPTS OF SINO-AMERICAN FAMILIES

A. *Research Objects*

1. Modern Family

Modern family is an American situation comedy with three families as background, including father Jay and stepmother Gloria, daughter Clair and her husband Phil and son Mitchell and his homosexual boyfriend Cameron, covering emotions, family education, interpersonal relationship, and cultural conflicts. The comedy presents us the genuine American lifestyles.

2. Home with kids

Home with kids is a situation comedy on nurturing Children in Chinese mainland on the basis of reconstructed family. The grass widower Xia Donghai who has two children named Xia Yu, Xia Xue, remarries another grass widow Liu Mei, who has one child named Liu Xing.

B. *Family Education Concepts of Sino-American Families*

Family education concepts derived from the larger philosophical issues that are part of cultural context. Cultural values guide both perception and communication. For above reasons, no matter why a conflict is raised or how people cope with it, family education concepts should be related.

1. Different Education Methods

a. Family Education Concepts of the Traditional Chinese Family

Influenced by Confucianism, Chinese parents hold authoritative position in family. Chinese family education concepts are reflected in Home with Kids in the following aspects: children are supposed to obey almost everything their parents order. From the moment the parents get home after work, they routinely talk endlessly, even though their children study in their own rooms, they don't stop chattering. Liu Mei is a representative of such mother. Once her children make mistakes or do something wrong, she will scold them seriously and sometimes may impose corporal punishment. As what Liu Xing puts it 'it is common in china that parents scold or beat their children, but in America, it is unlawful.'

b. Family Education Concepts of the Traditional American Family

American family education focuses on children's initiative. Parents respect individuality and human rights, and treat them as equal family members and establish democratic relationship with their children. These values are obviously embodied in Modern Family in the following plots: Alex feels frustrated and is ready to talk to her grandmother Gloria, who related her own whole love-relationship experiences in order to comfort her just like bosom friends. As Luke says to his father Phil, 'we are friends'. When the child commits mistakes, parents will try to communicate with them and listen to them. They will give approval to their right words and deeds but also guide them correct their mistakes by pointing out their wrong behaviors. When Manny wants to drop out from the sword competition, his mother doesn't criticize him on the spot with pushy words, instead, she persuades him in soft ways and finally Manny participates in the competition.

2. Different Education Contents

a. Education Contents of the Traditional Chinese Family

Chinese family education attaches the training of language and logical ability, namely knowledge input first. Generally speaking, what Chinese parents educate their children are limited to study performance, defined as Utilitarian Knowledge. And art education is just compensation for the lack of knowledge, not the education in the real sense. These are also reflected in Home with Kids: After a parents' meeting held by school, Liu Mei is eager to know Liu Xing's teachers' evaluation to Liu Xing, and she wants to get answers from Xia Donghai, who attends the parents' meeting. Xia knows that if Liu gets the truth, Liu Xing will fall into trouble. So he wisely avoids responding to her. From this plot, we see clearly children's performance really matters to parents.

b. Education Contents of the Traditional American Family

American family education is diversified in contents, balancing their development in physical power, recognition, language, social ability and emotions. It is billed as education for all-around development. American parents focus on

outdoor activities and physical exercise, including swing and hikes in nature. In *Modern Family*, parents often take their children for outdoor exercises, such as bicycling and playing basketball and football in order to train their body movements. When disagreements arise, parents will not interfere in their rights to free choice, instead, they will provide advice to their children with their own experiences. When Alex studies hard and scored number one in his class, his parents Phil and Claire feel uneasy, for they worry about Alex's health and decide to take him outside for relaxation.

3. Different Education Purposes

a. Education Purposes of the Traditional Chinese Family

Since ancient times, China has placed much importance on family education. Parents hope that their children can be pillars in society. As such, Chinese family education is a sort of family activity. In traditional Chinese culture, man is understood as the existence of group and sociality is valued. Therefore, children education will be linked with family development. And the so-called modern education advocates that children are never allowed to lose at the beginning. Parents are ready to take all the housework for their children who are sent to the first-class schools. Because they hope their children can rank first in study performance. In *Home with Kids*, these are reflected in the following plots: on the day that Xia Xue takes the national college entrance examination, both Liu Mei and Xia Donghai get up earlier, Liu is accustomed to getting up ahead of time, while Xia is insomniac because he is worried about the examination. Xia Xue feels confident after the exams; the whole family is covered by happiness. Unfortunately, Xia Xue fails to enter Tsinghua University. Liu is sick for months of constant work. From this plot it is obvious that the whole family attach much importance to the college entrance examination. Parents hope their children can enter famous university.

b. Education Purposes of the Traditional American Family

American values individuality and personal interests, which is the core of American culture. To cultivate their children into a social person who is able to adapt to various environment with independent living abilities serves the purpose of American family education. Parents will respect children's willingness in setting family education goals. This is embodied in the *Modern Family* in the following plots: Alex is allowed to choose her favorite violoncello course although she has to carry it herself to the classroom; Phil appreciates Luke's purity and innocence and doesn't push him to learn other skills. For the 15-year-old Haley's love, he doesn't interfere it and allow her to experience herself. Although at first he disagrees Mitchell's homosexual love, at last he accepts Cameron and their family. It is Manny's words that best translate American family education--- I don't want to give up doing myself for even a second.

IV. THE CULTURAL REASONS LEADING TO FAMILY CONFLICTS

A. *Chinese Parent-child Relationship*

Traditional Chinese culture is widely considered to be built upon Confucianism which requires a hierarchical family structure. Filial piety represents one form of hierarchy in a Chinese family. Because of the influence of Confucianism, filial piety is considered as a traditional virtue in Chinese kinship. The filial piety represents an obligation of every Chinese people that the young generation has to show their filial obedience to their parents and support them; Filial piety has always been a core value orientation in Chinese family. So the power of the elder in the family greatly surpasses that in American families. In the sitcom, filial piety is always an important theme interwoven in the stories. The unshakable authority of the elder can be found in the relationships among Liu Mei, Xia Donghai, and Liu Mei's mother in the sitcom.

B. *American Parent-child Relationship*

Since individualism has been deeply rooted, the Americans frequently place great value on independence. Parent-child relationship is no exception, but it does not mean that the family tie is weak. The American people cherish the family love and kinship as much as the Chinese do. But the difference is that they have their own way to interpret and express their love toward family members, which is not the same as the Chinese style. For example, the American people believe that love need to be expressed not only by action, but also by words. That is why "I love you" can be frequently heard among American family members. Besides, a short distance between American parents and their children is noticeable. The parents, apart from playing a role of teacher, play some other roles like friends for their children, which is helpful for the communication and sharing between parents and children.

V. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ON THE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT OF SINO-AMERICAN FAMILIES

As the education concepts of these two countries and families are discussed, this part is to compare and contrast the family conflict management in those two cultures under the guidance of Hofstede's six dimensions of cultural values.

A. *Conflict Management in Chinese Culture*

From the perspective of cultural values, according to Hofstede's value dimensions, China tends to be a collectivist, high-power distance, masculine, low uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation country (1980). And from the cultural value context, it is not difficult to understand why Chinese people prefer to make a compromise to resolve conflict. First, Chinese people's pursuit of harmony reminds them to avoid conflict as far as possible. An indirect and non-confrontational strategy is used to manage the conflict, and maintaining harmony is still their first consideration

and purpose. Second, collectivism is the culture which highly concerns about the collective interest and lowly concerns about the individual's. In certain conditions, the individual would sacrifice himself/ herself to ensure the interest of the team, like family, ethnic group, or nation. Third, in front of the elder in a family context, or in front of the authority in an organization, it is easy for Chinese people to compromise because they highly value the filial piety and the traditional virtue of respecting the elder. Since the last two decades, many intercultural communication researchers began to study conflicts styles in Chinese society. Differences and similarities have been found between China and America. In the study by Ting-Toomey (1985) about the differences in conflict management between low-context and high-context cultures, the author points out that the Chinese people, as the people in high-context cultures, tend to enter into a conflict when their culturally normative expectations are violated. And they are likely to make use of a tactful, non-confrontational, and affective style in managing conflicts.

From the sitcom *Home with kids*, Chinese audience may be quite familiar with the pictures that the kids dare not to talk at all when the parents show their absolute authority by taking a serious facial expression, an angry voice or look in the eyes. When dealing with parent-child conflicts, most children follow the traditional Confucianism values, such as being obedient to their parents or the elder, sacrificing their own interest for collective harmony, or avoiding the direct confrontation with their family. For example, when Liu Xing assumes the responsibility of breaking the window of his classroom for his best friend, his mother threatens to beat Liu Xing without listening to his explanation patiently. His mother is always too much confident about her own judgment before the truth is found. Instead of telling the truth to his parents, Liu Xing dare not to explain anything. But after knowing the truth, Xia Donghai, Liu Xing's step father shows his understanding, and out of the son's expectation Liu Xing does not get scolded, but is praised for helping his friend.

B. *Conflict Management in American Culture*

According to Hofstede's value dimensions, America tends to be an individualistic, low-power distance, masculine, low uncertainty avoidance and short-term orientation country (1980). According to the studies on the conflict management of the American people in low-context culture, American people tend to be confrontational and direct in handling with conflict, hence, the obliging and avoiding styles are less used. They actually resort more to direct, confrontational and assertive dominating styles. And the reason for the frequent use of dominating style can be traced back to the American cultural factors and values which are characterized by individualism. They value the individual achievement, personal identity, individual privacy and independence, which are full of the competitive spirit and challenge. And these personalities urge them to strive for equality and self-discipline over relationships. In low-context cultures, American people value independence, freedom and personal rights. Therefore, they usually hold an objective and logical view during their conflict managing process.

From the American sitcom *Modern Family*, there are many details of the American family conflict management presented on the TV screen. The dominating style can be clearly noticed—the face-to-face talk between the parents and their kids, the out-loud pronouncement for personal assertion, and low hierarchy. In the conflicts between parents and children, parents regard themselves as equal as their kids, which helps them listen to the kids and talk with them calmly and sincerely. Sometimes the parents apologize to their children actively, which shows the respect of parents to the young generation and help to harmonize the parent-child relationship. It would be obvious to notice, especially for the Chinese audiences, that the American values can improve the family conflicts managing positively, and help maintain their familial harmony. The most impressive thing is their close and equal parent-children relationship. This is embodied in the following plot: When Mitchell was a young man, Jay had been giving him a masculine style education. But when Mitchell showed his own sexual orientation, as a father, Jay was somewhat unacceptable in his mind. But he doesn't interfere it and try to understand his son. They try to communicate sincerely and exchange opinions with each others. Although at first Jay disagree Mitchell's homosexual love, at last he accepts Cameron and their family.

C. *Comparative Analysis and Discussion*

On the basis of the theories by the western scholars, conflict raised in low-context culture is different from the one in high-context culture. In low-context culture, the individual is highly concerned, while the society or group is considered more important in high-context culture. In the same mode, conflict in the individualistic cultures, typically low-context cultures like America, would be preferred to be managed directly and straightforward. Oppositely, conflict in the collectivistic cultures, typically high-context cultures such as China, would be dealt with indirectly, cautiously, and ambiguously.

According to the observation on the conflict management behaviors in two families of the sitcoms, Chinese family adopts the dominating style in coping with their family conflict as frequently as the American family; and American family actually spends so much time and resorts to the obliging style in dealing with their parent-child and husband-wife conflict, since family harmony is the same wish in different families. And the trigger of the parent-child conflicts depends on its exact context, on which the cultural values are influential but not decisive. As for the compromising style, according to its definition that this style indicates intermediate concern for self and others, it is hard to evaluate what behavior belongs to this style. But when dealing with the family conflicts, people (including parents and children) often compromise to each other, and it actually helps to suppress conflicts.

According to the observation, another idea is presented that cultural values have both positive and negative effect on the conflict management in a family. The positive effect means since the cultural values are translated into people's

action, it would be unconscious or convenient for people of each culture to cope with the relationship among the family members, and it can be easy, natural and comfortable to accept for one another. And the negative effect means that in one culture, the Chinese traditional values such as hierarchy, if emphasized too much in a family, would limit the developing pace for a family member. In the American culture, those dominant values such as individualism could be triggers of family conflict, since people may insist on their own opinions or interest, which would lead to their selfishness.

VI. CONCLUSION

This thesis mainly discusses the differences in Sino-American family conflicts management in *Modern Family* and *Home with Kids*. Because of the globalization and China's opening policy, Chinese families begin to absorb various information from the outside, and people's minds are changed and improved by those new alien information. Especially the outside values produce impact on Chinese families and have a great effect on them, like the changes of the Xia's. The changes can bring some new conflicts among the family members of different generations. However, the traditional Confucianism is still the core culture which is reflected in every aspect in the life of the Xia's. Meanwhile, the similarities between the Xia's and the Phil's are clear. Both families have three kids, and the family members are confronted with family conflicts, and sometimes conflicts occur between the family and the out-group. Besides, similarities in their conflict management strategies can be obtained from the two sitcoms. For example, a sincere apology from parents to children and a close and friendly talk between the elder and the young. These findings will be beneficial not only to Chinese families but also to American ones. In addition, they will provide useful insights for scholars abroad and domestic to make further research in this domain. Although there is still a large gap between the two cultures, people can find the similarities and learn to improve their communication and family relationship.

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A Review of Language Learning Strategy Research

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Abstract—Language learning strategy, a crucial variable of individual differences in second language acquisition (SLA), has been a fiercely discussed topic since 1970s, attracting a large number of researchers and teachers who have already made great achievements. This article aims to conduct a small-scale review of studies concerning language learning strategy, finding that studies in this respect were done mainly from perspectives of definition, identification and classification, usage and assessment and instruction of language learning strategy, and factors which exert influences on it. It is plausible to say that research on this issue is comparatively comprehensive, appreciating wide coverage and great achievements, but certain points are still in controversy. Although there are many related studies, rare studies were devoted to language learning strategy under the context of learners in mainland China. Subsequently, implications for further research and pedagogy in terms of language learning strategy are discussed.

Index Terms—language learning strategy, definition, identification and classification, usage and assessment, instruction, factor

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the career of English teacher has begun, a phenomenon have been noticed that students in a same class taught by a same teacher using same teaching methods perform differently in English acquisition, with some students being more successful than others, no matter English as a mother language, second language or foreign language. It is consistent with what Gass & Selinker (2008) pointed out that “one of the most widely recognized facts about second language learning is that some individuals are more successful in learning a second language than other individuals” (p. 395). Of course, there is a series of complicated factors behind the phenomenon, which interact with each other to exert influence on students’ second/foreign language learning. Some are extrinsic, being related to language and society, while some are intrinsic, being related to students themselves, for instance, aptitude, motivation, attitude, gender, learning style, language proficiency, autonomy and the like (Carson & Longhini, 2002; Gass & Selinker 2008; Murray, 2010; Nisbet, Tindall & Arroyo, 2005; Park, 1997; Wharton, 2000). This article conducts a review of studies revolving around one of those variables in individual differences in second/foreign language acquisition, that is, language learning strategy.

Taking language learning strategy as the core, libraries were visited and the Internet was surfed so as to find as more studies concerning this issue as possible, then using language learning strategy (ies) as key words to search relevant studies in order to find lots of studies in this respect as well and finally choosing those whose titles have key words of (language) learning strategy (ies). After such kind of literature retrieval, 24 journal articles and books were gathered, which were used as the subject of analysis in this paper. After reviewing and analyzing these studies, this article summarizes different perspectives of language learning strategy research and discusses their implications for further research and pedagogy.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since 1970s, growing studies have focused their attention on language learning strategy, which could be generally divided into two broad areas, that is, theoretical research and empirical research. After conducting a small-scale review of studies about language learning strategy which were retrieved, different perspectives of language learning strategy research could be discerned, namely, definition, identification and classification, practical usage and assessment, and training/instruction of language learning strategy, and factors influencing language learning strategy use.

In fact, those studies cannot be divided in such a clear-cut way because a number of studies are involved in more than one aspect. For instance, O’Malley & Chamot (1990) investigated language learning strategy systematically by reviewing previous research, explaining rationale for and contribution to integrating cognitive theory into strategy research, and discussing its definition, classification, usage, effectiveness, and instruction. Similarly, Oxford (1990) conducted a comparatively complete research, including its definition, feature, classification, assessment and instruction, and how to apply strategies to listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Torres (2013) reviewed certain definitions and classifications of language learning strategy, examined “good” language learners’ strategy use and proposed an approach to strategy training and self-regulatory awareness practice. While there are some scholars who conducted a literature review, discussing strategy training model, definition, classification, and factors influencing language learning

strategy use (Lee, 2010; Liu, 2010). This article makes a classification of the retrieved studies in such a way in order to gain a general scenery of studies about language learning strategy. The classification is as follows.

Firstly, in terms of the definition of language learning strategy, it has not been reached a consensus. There are different descriptions of definition of language learning strategy. Scholars have discussed it from different angles (Cohen, 1998; Lee, 2010; Liu, 2010; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992; Torres, 2013; Tseng, Dörnyei & Schmitt, 2006). Oxford gave a definition of language learning strategy as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferrable to new situations" (Oxford, 1990, p. 8). On the other hand, Scarcella and Oxford defined it as "specific actions, behaviors, steps, techniques [or thoughts]—such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task—used by students to enhance their own learning" (Oxford, 2003, p. 274). Cohen believed that language learning strategies are "those processes which are consciously selected by learners and which may result in action taken to enhance the learning or use of a second or foreign language, through the storage, retention, recall, and application of information about that language" (Gass & Selinker, 2008, p. 439). O'Malley & Chamot thought learning strategies as "the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information" (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, p. 1).

Although the wording of definitions of language learning strategy proposed by different scholars varies, there are some common points behind them, which are of great importance. Oxford summarized those common points of language learning strategy as follows:

1. Contribute to the main goal, communicative competence.
2. Allow learners to become more self-directed.
3. Expand the role of teachers.
4. Are problem-oriented.
5. Are specific actions taken by the learner.
6. Involve many aspects of the learner, not just the cognitive.
7. Support learning both directly and indirectly.
8. Are not always observable.
9. Are often conscious.
10. Can be taught.
11. Are flexible.
12. Are influenced by a variety of factors (Oxford, 1990, p. 9).

Secondly, some researchers were committed to identifying and classifying different types of language learning strategies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1981). There are many ways to identify language learning strategies such as interviews, diaries, questionnaires, and think aloud protocol. The think aloud protocol might be the most popular way to identify language learning strategies. After identifying different strategies, scholars embarked on classifying them and different scholars have different classification modes. O'Malley & Chamot (1990) classified language learning strategies into three broad types, that is, metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and social/affective strategies (pp. 42-55). Oxford divided the language learning strategies into "two major classes: direct and indirect. These two classes are subdivided into a total of six groups (memory, cognitive, and compensation under the direct class; metacognitive, affective, and social under the indirect class)" (Oxford, 1990, p.14). Rubin classified them into strategies that directly affect learning, including clarification/verification, monitoring, memorisation, guessing/inductive inferencing, deductive reasoning, and practice, and processes that contribute indirectly to learning, including creation of opportunities for practice and production tricks (Lee, 2010, p139).

Thirdly, how learners use language learning strategies and how to assess the usage of language learning strategies attracted attentions of other researchers and teachers (Fan, 2003; Gu, Hu & Zhang, 2005; Lai, 2009; Murray, 2010; Park, 1997; Vandergrift, 2003; Wharton, 2000). Gu, Hu & Zhang (2005) conducted an empirical study on lower primary school pupils' use of language learning strategies in Singapore to check whether the think-aloud protocol would be applicable to investigate children's language learning strategy use. Wharton (2000) studied strategy use by university students learning Japanese and French as foreign languages in Singapore and factors impacting their strategy use based on Oxford's (1990) SILL. Vandergrift (2003) examined listening strategy use by grade 7 students learning French as a foreign language, finding that more skilled and less skilled listeners used strategies differently. Lai (2009) researched strategy use by EFL learners in Taiwan with result that proficient and less proficient subjects adopted different strategies. Fan (2003) studied Cantonese speakers learning English vocabulary, focusing on identification of vocabulary learning strategies.

In order to assess the effectiveness of a certain language learning strategy use, a majority of scholars adopted Oxford's SILL (Carson & Longhini, 2002; Hsiao & Oxford, 2002; Lee, 2010; Murray, 2010; Nisbet, Tindall & Arroyo, 2005; Park, 1997; Wharton, 2000). Meanwhile, realizing certain limitations of SILL, some scholars gave thought about new approaches to assess language learning strategy use (Tseng, Dörnyei & Schmitt, 2006). Tseng, Dörnyei & Schmitt (2006) proposed "Self-Regulating Capacity in Vocabulary Learning" (SRCvoc) to measure language learners' self-regulatory capacity in English vocabulary learning. Setiyadi (2014) investigated language learning strategies employed by 88 EFL students at an Indonesian university and then put forward a language learning strategy measurement for EFL

learners. Woodrow (2005) discussed usefulness of using Likert-type scales to assess learning language strategies, finding it was not appropriate and proposed a new approach using qualitative methods.

Fourthly, different learners have the possibility of using different strategies successfully or unsuccessful because there are factors of variety behind it which influence learning language strategy use. Adopting a diary study, Carson & Longhini (2002) investigated the learning environment (Spanish-speaking Argentina) and learning style influencing the diarist's strategy use by employing Oxford's SILL. Murray (2010) examined the factor of language proficiency in context of Korean as a foreign language by utilizing Oxford's SILL with result that a generally low positive relation between strategy use and proficiency was found. Utilizing Oxford's SILL, Park (1997) conducted research on EFL university students in Korea, focusing on the factor of language proficiency with results that there is a linear relation between them and certain strategies are used more frequently than others. Nisbet, Tindall & Arroyo (2005) adopted Oxford's SILL to examine factors of language proficiency and gender in the context of Chinese EFL university students with results that minimal correlation between proficiency and strategy use was found, and it seemed gender didn't exert influence on language learning strategy use. Wharton discussed factors affecting strategy use by university students learning Japanese and French in Singapore, language proficiency and gender in particular, while at the same time listing a series of factors as follows:

A number of factors are assumed to affect the types, numbers, and frequency of use of language learning strategies: cultural background, language studied, stage of learning, age, motivation, language learning goals, FL versus second language (SL) settings, previous language learning experience, language learning styles (including the influence of language teaching methods and task requirements), gender, anxiety, lack of inhibition, and career or academic specialization (Wharton, 2000, p. 207).

Fifthly, some researchers and teachers have invested great efforts in studying instruction/training of language learning strategies. Although there is a minority of scholars who believe there is little or no relation between language learning strategy use and development of language learning, a number of studies show that successful language learners could appropriately utilize various strategies with a high frequency in different contexts, while less successful language learners usually use fewer strategies in a less efficient way. Generally speaking, language learning strategies could be helpful to improve learners' language learning. "L2 learning strategies can help learners improve their own perception, reception, storage, retention, and retrieval of language information" (Oxford, 2003, p. 274). Oxford (1990) believed appropriate language learning strategies could improve learners' proficiency and self-confidence (p. 1). And Lai (2009) thought "training students in using learning strategies and assisting them in developing their own unique ways of learning would make them independent and effective learners" (p. 276). Moreover, "less successful language learners can be taught new strategies, thus helping them become better language learners" (Chamot, 2005, p. 112). "In general, strategy specialists believe that learners with strategic knowledge of language learning, compared with those without, become more efficient, resourceful, and flexible, thus acquiring a language more easily" (Tseng, Dörnyei & Schmitt, 2006, p. 78).

Since language learning strategy use is proved to be useful and beneficial to language learning in most cases, whether language learning strategies from successful learners could be taught to or shared with those less successful ones, or in other words, is language learning strategy teachable? As for this question, scholars hold different viewpoints. On the one hand, a minority of scholars hold negative viewpoints (Plonsky, 2011; Rees-Miller, 1993; Skehan, 1989). "Studies of SI [strategy instruction] have also produced negative and mixed results across many of the same contexts, treatments, and outcome variables" (Plonsky, 2011, p. 994). "Although most researchers of language learning strategies believe learning strategies can be taught, others (Rees-Miller, 1993; Skehan, 1989) are more skeptical or cautious" (Wharton, 2000, p. 206). On the other hand, a majority of scholars cherish positive views (Hassan, et al, 2005; Macaro, 2006; Park, 1997;). Park (1997) suggested that language learning strategies should be taught in class. "Despite some setbacks and some reservations, learner strategy instruction (or 'training') appears to be effective in promoting successful learning if it is carried out over lengthy periods of time and if it includes a focus on meta-cognition" (Macaro, 2006, p. 321). Hassan, Macaro, Mason, Nye, Smith & Vanderplank (2005) conducted a deep review of 38 studies concerning language learning strategy training, pointing out "there is sufficient research evidence to support claims that training language learners to use strategies is effective, but it is not possible to say from this evidence whether the effect of training is long-lasting or not" (Hassan, et al., 2005).

It seems that people holding positive view about effectiveness of language learning strategy instruction/training outnumber those holding negative view. At all events, it is advisable that teachers should grasp a deep understanding of language learning strategies so that they can help students adopt appropriate strategies to aid their language learning. This article aims to embark on this issue by conducting a literature review of language learning strategies as the first step, hoping teachers/instructors who haven't given a thought on this point now gain a primary understanding of it.

III. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

As far as language learning strategy research is concerned, it has a comparatively comprehensive coverage varying from definition, identification, classification, usage, assessment, instruction to factors influencing language learning strategy. Nonetheless, some research perspectives might deserve in-depth study.

First of all, great attention were paid to relationship between language proficiency and learning strategy use, whereas certain factors such as culture, learning environment, learning style and so on get little attention. Therefore, relevant studies could expand their coverage to new factors.

Secondly, a large number of previous studies utilized the classification system of Oxford's SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) while investigating language learning strategy use. The SILL which has two versions, namely, Version 5.1 and Version 7.0, is a structured survey based on Oxford's (1990) strategy system. It consists of multiple-choice questions and is graded by the 5-point scale ranging from "never or almost never" to "always or almost always" to assess frequency of language learning strategy use. Version 5.1 containing 80 items is aimed at native English speakers, while Version 7.0 having 50 items is targeted against learners of English as a second or foreign language (Oxford, 1990, p. 199). Oxford's SILL has been questioned by some scholars. For instance, Tseng, Dörnyei & Schmitt (2006) pointed out, "the scales in the SILL are not cumulative and computing mean scale scores is not justifiable psychometrically" (p. 83). Therefore, it is advised that future research could conduct experiments about different classification systems or put forward new systems.

Thirdly, it is of great possibility that a number of teachers do not grasp a large repertoire of language learning strategies (in fact, many teachers haven't given a thought on language learning strategies, but they just teach what the course books tells), or they know many language learning strategies, but they just don't know how to explicitly instruct/train students in this respect; on the contrary, there is also another possibility that some researchers grasp a large repertoire of language learning strategies, but they do not have opportunities to apply them to classrooms or they don't have opportunities to share with teachers. Therefore, it is advisable that researchers and teachers would work together to run training workshops or programs for training pre-service and in-service teachers, especially for those at ordinary universities (contrast to those prestigious universities) who had rare opportunities to take further education in this regard. Or forums or conferences concerning such kind of topics could be held frequently to facilitate communications in this field between researchers and teachers.

Fourthly, which language learning strategies could be taught or how to conduct strategies instruction deserves researchers and teachers' attention because language teachers could take full advantages of first-hand materials directly to help students acquire a certain language and an effective language learning strategy would be much helpful to language learners. Moreover, corresponding materials and curriculum development revolving around language learning strategies should be worthy of investing great efforts. And more action studies would be designed to test the effectiveness of a certain language learning strategies.

Last but not least, with the deepening of China's Reform and Opening-up and the Belt and Road Initiative, growing Chinese begin to actively learn English as a foreign language, covering every levels of education in China from kindergarten to doctor; however, it is not hard to find that rare studies have been devoted to language learning strategy use in context of Chinese university students, let alone those at tier-3 university (universities in China could be generally divided into three types hierarchically, namely, top universities as tier-1, major universities as tier-2, and ordinary universities as tier-3). Consequently, attentions might be paid more to Chinese university students who are learning English language, in particular those tier-3 university students and primary or secondary school students in order to help them improve their English learning.

On the other hand, language learning strategy instruction deserves attention as well. Although there are many studies focusing on strategy instruction, it still needs more efforts to study how to conduct strategy instruction and how to instruct teachers to instruct language learning strategy to facilitate language learners acquire a certain language. Just as Plonsky pointed out that "turning to the effects of SI [strategy instruction] with different outcome variable, the data indicate that SI is much more effective for certain skills than for others" (Plonsky, 2011, p. 1010), teachers should take different factors into consideration and then decide which strategies should be adopted to be explicitly taught. Furthermore, teachers could choose certain strategies which they think are appropriate to design certain action research projects in order to check whether they are indeed helpful to their students under that context. Then, teachers should make a clear explanation for students that "a learning strategy cannot, a priori, be categorized as either good or bad" (Oxford, 2003, p. 274), but be appropriate for certain people in certain context. Next, researchers or language teachers from different countries or in different contexts of language learning would be encouraged to share their first-hand studies or experiences so as to cover a wider area of language learning strategies. Moreover, the subjects of studies in terms of language learning strategies would be expanded and be covered more to middle schools because a successful language experience should be based on a solid language base, consequently, it is of necessity to conduct more studies about language learning strategies of primary and secondary students in order to help them grasp a more effective language learning strategies to improve their language proficiency.

IV. CONCLUSION

Language learning strategies, as an important variable of individual differences of second language acquisition, play a crucial role in language learning and attract lots of attention from researchers and teachers. Numerous studies were devoted to language learning strategies, covering a wide area. This article conducts a small-scale review of studies concerning language learning strategies and generally divides them into several perspectives of definition, identification and classification, usage and assessment, and instruction/training of language learning strategies, and factors

influencing language learning strategy use. Although research on this issue covers comparatively complete perspectives, some perspectives still need in-depth research theoretically and pedagogically. For example, factors like culture, learning settings, styles and others impacting strategy use deserve further research. New classification systems of language learning strategies should be proposed under the backdrop of changing learning environments and methods to advance with the times. Materials and curriculum about language learning strategy instruction should be developed correspondingly. Training workshops for teachers in terms of strategy instruction should be run. More forums or conferences in this field would be held to facilitate communication between researchers and teachers. Then the language learning strategy research of English as a foreign language in the context of China's education deserve more attention.

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An Overview of Research on Family Language Planning

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Abstract—Family language planning is part of the micro-fields of linguistic policy and language planning. As for more and more children grow up in a bilingual or multilingual environment. We view the family as an important social linguistic environment. This paper briefly expounds the theory of micro language planning and focuses on the family language planning. And in this paper, the importance of family language planning, influenced factors and implications on family language planning are examined in depth. The development of foreign language education in family language planning also should be put into action positively.

Index Terms—family language planning, factors, implication, foreign language education

I. INTRODUCTION

Language plays an important part in cross-cultural communication. And Language gradually changes from the soft power of the state to the solid power of the state. In recent years, many scholars have noticed the importance of language planning and had many achievements. Language planning is the intervention, management and allocation of language resources for government departments and related agencies, and it involves many aspects of social life. Specifically speaking, language planning consists of three dimensions: macro, meso and micro (Kaplan & Baldauf 1997). Macro language planning usually refers to the rule of state or government in a macro level, it is usually performed by the government departments, intended to influence the way of discourse within the social and cultural practice. Meso language planning mainly refers to the maintenance and rehabilitation of language, which goes to formulate and implement corresponding plans and policies for the protection and rehabilitation of these languages. Moreover, from the micro perspective of language planning, it includes various fields, such as the family, school, management department, production department, law enforcement agencies, sales and services, community and social organization structure. Micro-language planning is the principal form of language planning in the miniaturization, individualization and localization. In the early 1980s, Kaplan first launched the study of micro-planning practice and achieved fruitful results. Since then, Barkhuizen & Knoch (2006), Baldauf (2006) and Canagarajah (2005) have further studied and improved this type of language planning. There has not much research on family language planning. Therefore, family language planning is the subject of the paper.

II. FAMILY LANGUAGE PLANNING

Family Language Planning is less effective in a time when social mobility didn't occur, and people speak their parents' mother tongue in their families. But with the advent of globalization, the role of family language planning has become more and more prominent. Family language planning refers to plans and ideas that affect the language use of family members and so on. Family language planning is the foundation of language planning. From the existing results, the focus of language planning is primarily on the use of language or language problems in the public. But the language structure of the family is often neglected (Wiley & Wright 2004, Robinson & Richard Brecht 2006.). Therefore, the study of family language planning can provide meaningful empirical support for language planning research. Moreover, China is now forming a "multilingual" society, where parents will consider how their children will use language and which language to be used in the future. The parents will also formulate their own language planning for their babies. Therefore, family language exerts a fundamental influence on children's language development.

III. THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY LANGUAGE PLANNING

With the language of human beings improving gradually, we finally move out of the animal kingdom, and we have the words to say goodbye to barbarism and enter the age of civilization. The importance of language to human beings can be overstated. And language is important to ensure that individual's existence, quality and development of life. Therefore, in the process of developing national language planning, family language planning gradually presents its own importance.

A. *FLP Can Get the Solution to Language Problems in Society*

There is a duality or multiplicity of things in the world, so is language. It has special social resources, which can be used by people to make full use of its infinite resource value and create great collective wealth. However, it can also

become a complicated language problem, which causes great harm and burden to the society and needs people to cope with it seriously. In other words, effectively solving language problems will facilitate the rationalization of language resources. Therefore, I think family language planning can efficiently balance the language problems in society. For example, when parents come from different areas; they have two distinct dialects, and they use either mandarin or dialects during the communication. In this way, we can develop productive language resources (regardless of its value) and solve the problem of language hegemony and language diversity.

B. FLP Is Conducive to the Development of Children's Language Acquisition

China is a multi-ethnic country with a huge population. And the development of children's language can affect the direction of national language planning. Thus, when a child is born, parents should consider whether to let their children learn mandarin, whether it is a dialect or a national language and should think about when a child contact with a foreign language and start making family language plans. For example, an American linguist married a Serbian wife. They lived in a French-speaking city in Canada. The couple agreed to use German when communicating with their children. But this is a decision that takes into account the language surrounding the child, because children can learn English well in North America, children can also learn French from their surroundings (three varieties of French- in the school they learned French; and communicating with their neighbors, they learned French from Quebec; and playing with the children of French consular staff they learned the standard French.). On the other hand, in the survey of adolescents, it shows that the influence of parents' language awareness on the use of children's language is gradually weakened. Because of increased socialization of children and children's own language awareness, they prompt children to adjust their rates of using code in a unique context. For example, the survey of Nanjing primary and middle school students showed that the use of Nanjing dialect increased gradually with the increase of its age. Although many people have different emotional recognition of Nanjing dialect, they gradually realize the local identity and entertainment function of Nanjing dialect.

C. FLP Promotes Language Identification

Language, as a unique communication tool for human beings, is responsible for building personal identity, enhancing the sense of identity, while promoting interpersonal communication and interpersonal harmony. The influence of family environment on language selection and identity of language users mainly comes from the parents' attitudes towards the heritage language and the different experience of language users. Guardado (2010) investigated language, culture and identity of three Hispanic middle-class families. It turned out that the parents of the three families had given the heritage language multiple meanings. They expect their children to become bilingual or multilingual in a cosmopolitan world view of acquiring the language of their ancestors and to break the boundaries of region and have a broad vision. On the contrary, if the parents of interracial families had a negative attitude toward the heritage language, they do not encourage their children to learn the language of their ancestors in the process of growing up, their children will have little recognition of their own national heritage language (Shin 2010). Another example is over 50% of the Brazilians abroad are women, a proportion which seems to be even higher if we consider the number of mothers whose children attend Brazilian Portuguese language lessons in complementary schools in London. There are schools in which a lot of mothers were Brazilian migrants married to fathers of different countries, thus the relevance of the role these women play in the maintenance of their language. Furthermore, these women believed that these values and identity would be acquired by their children by the mere fact of speaking their mother tongue. This is the reason why they considered it important to pass on their language to their children. Even some people think that it is patriotic to learn mandarin well, and they also think that they have an identity of Chinese.

IV. FACTORS IN FLP

Wu wei (2003) believed that family language's changes were caused by changes in family language members and external environment. Thus, we believe that there are other factors that directly influence the maintenance of language and the transfer of language.

A. Language Ideology

We consider that there is a vital factor that directly influences maintenance of a language and transfer of a language, namely, language ideology. It mainly sets the basic framework for children's language development within the family. This framework can reflect both the language awareness of parents and the basic attitudes and awareness of language acquisition and development in the whole society (Shohamy 2006, Schiffman 1996). Language ideology is a conscious awareness of the nature of a language and the role of language in human life (James & Garrett 1991) and it is recognition of a language and a recognition of what can you do with a language and how you should use it (Li Wei & Moyer 2008). Kroskrity (2000), and other scholars believe that the different forms of a language can identify different social groups and language form as a part of daily life can identify the social identity and the typical behavior of a speaker. The speaker (and the listener) will notice and judge these identifiers, thereby creating different language awareness to help explain the differences in the language. Language awareness is not an abstract concept. It emphasizes the perception and consciousness of individuals or groups on language function and language form, which can directly

influence people's language behaviors in language. Why do some family members turn to mandarin? Why do some parents have some kinds of language expectation? Why do we form some kinds of linguistic attitude or linguistic identity? These are built on people's understanding of a language. Thus, we believe that the development of family language needs to carry out language awareness activities. Parents' language awareness plays a crucial role in family language planning and family language practice. Language awareness is the basis of language practice and language planning. And the language behaviors of family parents are closely related to their language awareness. Therefore, under the impact of family environment, the relationship between parents' language awareness, language practice and the final language acquisition of children has a progressive relationship.

B. Changes in the Language Environment

Changes in the environment can be also given an impact on the use of family languages. In recent years, a lot of migrant families have come into the city from the countryside, and most of them use their dialects in the hometown. They don't speak mandarin or other dialects. After getting into the city, their language dialects caused their communication barriers in the face of a strange environment, which led them to learn mandarin and other dialects as soon as possible. As it is, family's language changes and becomes bilingual or multilingual.

C. Changes in Family Members

The flow of members within a multi-ethnic country causes changes in family members. China is currently undergoing rapid development of urbanization. In this process, the most obvious change is the large augment of urban population and the floating population. In 2012, the statistics of the national bureau showed that China's urban population exceeded 690 million, with a floating population of about 260 million, and the floating population accounted for 16.53 percent of the total population. It estimates that the structure of Chinese cities is increasingly complex. Language makes the relative stability and the variability of a society. The change of urban residents' structure will inevitably lead to the change of urban languages, especially the family language.

V. IMPLICATIONS OF FLP

At present, China faces frequently population flow and complex language use. Particularly, there are phenomena of dialect and Putonghua. China should adjust its own policies in time to comply with the development of the time. At the same time, in the age of globalization, supporting linguistic diversity is now a permanent topic. Therefore, we should support the diversity of languages to enrich the language resources and solve the language problems caused by language resources' complexity. Because Language resource and language problem are dialectical unity, accompanied by each other. Therefore, I have some points as following:

A. The Family Language Should Be as the Complement of National Policies

The use of family language should be based on macro-linguistic policies. National language planning has always been passed on layer by layer, but it has not implemented smoothly. For example, in terms of the formulation of the language planning and language policies of ethnic minorities, the regional departments only respond to the national call, but the language situation in the region has not changed at all. Therefore, I think that if we want to protect language resources and to solve language problems, we should start from family language planning. At first, we should collect statistics, understand the geographical situation, then coordinate and develop language planning.

B. Encourage Family Members to Balance the Importance of Both Dialect and Mandarin

In recent years, due to the development of traffic, network technology and so on, people's language style is also changing. For parents from different regions, they should not only learn mandarin or other dialects to adapt to other environments, but also communicate with their families in their own dialect to show their affinity. However, under the changing environment, some families will deliberately teach their children mandarin to adapt to the environment. Therefore, they can only understand parents' s dialect but can't speak, unfortunately neglect the importance of dialect. Dialects are also included in the country's wealth, and influential dialects are highly sought after by foreign scholars. In this way, diverse dialects represent the diversity of national culture and bring wealth to our country. Therefore, we should be doing good publicity, and positive guidance.

C. Focus on the Language of Mobile Families

Countries need floating population to drive economic development, but language training for them is not considered. If the language is not understood, it's hard to go on working. In recent years, some scholars have studied the situation of migrant workers' language, and some scholars believe that they should pay greater attention to the vulnerable groups in the disadvantaged situation, namely the language education of migrant workers' children. Because many obstacles to children's language influence their better adaptation to urbanization.

VI. DEVELOPMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN FLP

After 1978, foreign language education in our country has developed rapidly, especially in English education. In

March 1979, the Ministry of Education issued a circular on strengthening foreign language education. It proposed that language's layout should have strategic vision and long-term planning. The principle of language is: The main task at present still is to develop English education energetically. But we should also pay attention to other common languages such as Japan, France, Germany and Russia. At present, the number of students in primary, middle and high schools in China is 130 million, more than 57 million and more than 10 million respectively. Students mainly develop foreign languages such as English, Russian and Japanese, of which English accounts for a large part. I think the family in the foreign language education planning also played a very important role. This paper puts forward some questions worth considering.

First, the advent of globalization has promoted the spread of English in the world, and it is no exception in China. Many families are under a clear plan for the cultivation of children's English. In doing so, on the one hand, they prepare children for future career development; on the other hand, they also fulfill the requirements of school education. Because English is a compulsory subject regardless of whether it is in primary school, secondary school or university, it is the threshold for children to have access to various educational opportunities. If you want to become an excellent person, you must learn English well. Thus, more and more families are creating opportunity to help children learn English. Therefore, parents' efforts in developing their children's English are in stark contrast to their indifferent attitude toward children's dialect learning. This contrast profoundly reflects the language of parents in the process of cultivating international citizens in a new era. Our research shows that in the family language planning and practice, parents regard English-American English, Anglo-American culture and English native speakers as models, and these models have become the target of children's English learning. Although the macro-social environment plays a more fundamental role in children's language acquisition, the role of family language practice and parental language ideology in maintaining mother tongue may be greater than the promotion of foreign language learning. However, for the number of urban families, parents' linguistic orientation and management practices undoubtedly play an extremely important role in children's language development and acquisition. Because of the parents' personal experience, they realized that globalization posed new requirements on the language ability of the workforce. These understandings in turn translate into their guiding ideology for planning children's language development. Does parents' extreme identification to English really meets national policy?

Second, although the development of small languages has gradually been increasing in recent years, parents are still at a bottleneck when compared to English. The family's desire for children's English goes far beyond other foreign language learning. The phenomenon impedes the formulation of the national plan for training multilingual talented people. Families should value foreign languages. Because of the development of globalization, the demand for foreign language talents has been further escalated. Merely grasping English can no longer meet the current need of all-round development of our country. Therefore, from English in major to English plus foreign languages training is imminent transformation. To master the professional talent, not only on their own knowledge and cultural literacy has improved to some extent, but also for children's future employment it would be a good point. According to McCarthy data companies, 2010 ~ 2012 foreign languages, such as Spain, Korean, French and other professional employment rate has entered the top 50. It exceeds the employment rate of English majors who has received the "red card" warning (Lu jinsong 2013). At present, foreign language classes are initiated in universities. It is clearly that the development of foreign languages will be stagnant and can't be valued. Confronted with such a situation, I think that family members should first have such a sense to develop children's multilingual development. Moreover, other aspects of child's development can get benefits, for example: multilingual children have good memory, excellent communication skills, creativity and much more.

It is noteworthy that, in carrying out family language planning, not only to consider the development of Chinese, but also attach to the cultivation of foreign languages. If necessary, linguists are required to provide guidance for family on language and the rational cooperation of family language users. Only in this way can we respond to the national language policy and adapt to the changes of the time.

VII. CONCLUSION

With the advent of globalization, urbanization, almost every family generally has been becoming bilingualism or multilingualism, so it is necessary for every family to do well in accordance with the laws of language and social development, and to do well in language planning that is in line with the guidance of national language policy and promotes the healthy promotion of family members' language ability. Therefore, the national language planning should be done in a practical way, beginning with the micro language planning and starting from family. A country is consisted of many families. The spread of language from families would be a vital step. Moreover, families influence children's language acquisition and other aspects of their life. Members of a family should follow demand of the current situation. And if necessary, linguists needed to provide guidance for families on language. What kind of impacts will China language culture have on the national language policy and family language planning research.

In a word, family language planning is the most terminal language plan of a society, but we can't just stick our minds to our home. We should consider about political, economic, cultural, and linguistic conditions at the same time. Also, through combing the characteristics of immigration or inheritance of families' several generations, we examine family's language awareness with methods of historical materialism. Rational planning will be submitted constructive opinions

and suggestions. At the same time, family language planning is incorporated into language plans for various levels such as community, domain, industry, country, and supranational, forming a multi-grid and three-dimensional planning pattern.

However, some studies use sociolinguistic investigation methods to describe the family's language attitudes, but they cannot deeply reveal the causes of family language changes and the internal mechanism of family language planning. Therefore, the author proposes that the study of family language planning in the future should adopt a scalable planning to study the interaction between children and parents, families and schools, communities, society, and countries. Finally, it is expected that more scholars will study and explore together, improve the theoretical system, and conduct groundbreaking family language studies that suit the national conditions.

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The Effects of Formative and Dynamic Assessments of Reading Comprehensions on Intermediate EFL Learners' Test Anxiety

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Abstract—The aim of this study was to investigate the effects of formative and dynamic assessments of reading comprehension on intermediate EFL learners' test anxiety. To conduct the study, 50 out of 66 intermediate Iranian EFL learners, males (N= 22) and females (N=28) with age range of 14 to 19 were selected from a private institute based on their performance on the Oxford Placement Test (syndicate, 2001). They were randomly classified into formative and dynamic assessment groups of intermediate EFL learners which were 25 learners in each group. For the formative group the researchers administered reading comprehension test after teaching each reading task. The researcher provides feedback for each student based on their performance on the test separately. For dynamic group the researcher used sandwich model of dynamic assessment i.e. after each reading task the researcher administered reading comprehension test as a pre-test then after collecting pre-test information, the researcher provided mediation and necessary information for answering test question generally to students. The data were collected through the pre-test and the post-test. For pre-test and post-test the researcher used test anxiety questionnaire (Sarason, 1984). The data were analyzed using SPSS software. The result of this study showed that formative assessment of reading comprehension have statistically significant effect on intermediate EFL learners' test anxiety reduction and dynamic assessment of reading comprehension have statistically significant effect on intermediate EFL learners' test anxiety reduction. Also dynamic assessment of reading comprehension had more effect on intermediate EFL learners' test anxiety reduction.

Index Terms—formative assessment, dynamic assessment, reading comprehension, test anxiety, EFL learner

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the important aspects of English language teaching and learning is the language assessments, as the future of students and language learners are at stake by the decisions made on the results of these assessments. Designing proper and useful assessment is vital for gaining high degrees of language achievement. There are two types of newly developing assessment in recent years which are formative and dynamic assessments. Formative assessment is a kind of classroom-based assessment which is concern with the language content and lesson objectives. Formative assessment determines whether a learner was success or not to achieve objective of a language program. It reflects the learners' abilities to master the material covered during instruction. But dynamic assessment goes beyond diagnostic role of testing in language teaching. Dynamic assessment concern with the learner's performance with assistance from teacher and the extent to which the learner can benefit from this assistance not only in completing the task, but in transferring this mediated performance to different tasks (Poehner & Lantolf, 2005).

On the other hand, reading is one of the most useful skills, especially in EFL contexts where access to foreign language is mainly rely on written language. Studies have shown that reading is an important source of input and it is also can be an anxiety provoking activity (Saito, Horwitz, & Garza, 1999). Test anxiety is an apprehension over evaluation and assessments. It is a fear of failing in test and conscious or unconscious stressful and fearsome experience by learners about tests. Anxiety about failure in the test or sense of unaccountability to response the test items can block reading comprehension process (Na, 2007). Unfamiliar words, writing system and cultural material can increase learners' anxiety and fear about reading comprehension tests. Generally speaking any kinds of anxiety potentially affect language teaching and testing.

In Iran EFL context static assessment in teaching and testing is dominant tool for evaluating learner language achievement and knowledge. Also in static assessment types they rely on summative assessment more than formative type of assessment. The focus of current trend of testing in Iran is on language product rather than language process. By using dynamic assessment principles in classroom, language process is considered too. In addition Iranian EFL learners commonly experience high level of anxiety in their assessment especially in high stake tests like university entrance test. Such an anxiety can decrease learners' motivation toward learning language. Moreover reading comprehension is the

other troublesome issue in Iranian English language learning context. Learners frequently show low level of reading comprehension potency in their language tests. So regarding above mentioned problems, the researcher wants to investigate the effects of formative and dynamic assessments of reading comprehension on intermediate EFL learners' test anxiety. The current study tried to answer the following questions:

Q1-Does formative assessment of reading comprehension have any statistically significant effect on intermediate EFL learners' test anxiety reduction?

Q2-Does dynamic assessment of reading comprehension have any statistically significant effect on intermediate EFL learners' test anxiety reduction?

Q3-What type of reading comprehensions' assessment has more effect on intermediate EFL learners' test anxiety reduction?

II. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

A. Theoretical Background

Until very recently static assessments dominantly used for evaluating and assessing learners specific language abilities. By using this kind of assessment learners' educational decisions are made based on the current status of the learners' abilities and learners' future predicted accordingly. Formative kind of assessments is static one too but it is administered frequently before completion of an instruction. As Bachman (1990) points out, formative assessment has a much closer view to instruction because it results gives more feedbacks into classroom teaching process rather than summative assessment. Although formative assessment can be beneficent in language learning, there are some concerns over their effectiveness in improving learning. Effective formative assessment in language teaching and assessment, must be based on integrated and harmonized practices. Formative assessment designed to determine whether a learner was on track of the objectives of language programs or not. Formative assessment shows students' standing place during the instructional programs and reflects the learners' abilities of mastering the material presented during the instructional period in the program.

Brown (2004) argued that effective formative assessment towards subsequent classrooms' instruction can show high level of consequential validity. The term formative assessment refers to procedures adopted in classrooms at different periods of time along a course of instruction aimed to providing the teacher and students with feedback of their success or failure in educational program (Bachman, 1990; Fulcher & Davidson, 2007). Formative assessment provides the necessary information for adjusting teaching and learning at the time they are happening. In this sense, formative assessment informs teacher or instructor about students' level of knowledge that achieved at a point of timely adjustments occur. These adjustments can help teacher or instructor to ensure students achieve targeted learning goals within a course program. Poehner and Lantolf (2005) criticized this view and argued that in formative assessment, assessment and instruction remain two separate parts. Also according to Torrance and Pryor (1998) the linkage between assessment and learning is vague for teachers and there is no actual intervention in the process of the learners' development in formative assessment practices in classroom level.

Ellis (2003) argued there are two major types of formative assessment including planned and incidental formative assessments. The planned formative assessment directly evaluates learners' language knowledge or ability to perform tasks and uses a rating scale to measure learners' achievements. The incidental formative assessments occur through the instructional conversations between teachers and students during classroom practices. In addition he distinguishes two types of incidental formative assessment including internal and external incidental formative assessments. Internal one occurs when teacher asks questions and provides immediate feedback for learners' performance. On the other hand, the external incidental formative assessment is based on teacher and students reflection on learner performance either while in doing tasks or after completing them (Ellis, 2003). Consequently, Stenberg and Grigorenko (2002) believed to a paradigm shift in the formative assessment practices to integrate instruction and assessment as a unified activity i.e. dynamic assessment practices.

It is very obvious that such a decision or prediction cannot be very fair and valid because human kind are in constant changing process all the time. Unlike static approaches to assessment, dynamic assessment seeks to instruction during the assessment itself and signifies the pedagogical function of assessment in providing opportunities for learning. Recently the introduction of dynamic assessment is seen as a response against static tests shortcoming which measure the learner's current knowledge (Poehner, 2008). Dynamic Assessment is originated from the theory of Vygotsky's social constructivism which is named as socio-cultural perspective. Child's learning takes place through presenting and participating in sociocultural experiences with a more experienced adult or more knowledge educator (Poehner & Lantolf, 2005). The dynamic assessment concern with learning process so it is highly interactive and process-oriented assessment.

Lidz (1991) defines dynamic assessment as an approach that follows a test-intervene-retest format and that focuses on learner modifiability and based on producing interventions by more knowledgeable individuals toward improving learners' performance. Poehner (2008) defines dynamic assessment as an active collaboration with learners which simultaneously shows their current abilities and promotes their potential future development. In classroom level dynamic assessment means as an understanding of learners' abilities supporting by instruction aims to promoting learner abilities to next level of knowledge. Feuerstein, Rand and Rynders (1988) emphasized the mediated interaction

between the learner and the environment, claims that in mediation learning should be implied into the process of teaching. Dynamic assessment is process-oriented assessment and goes beyond the cognitive measure of the one-shot and product-oriented standardized test. The dynamic assessor instructs learners on how to complete tasks and activities, provides mediated assistance on how to master them, and evaluates their progress in learning to solve similar problems in future without mediation (Kirschenbaum, 1998).

Dynamic assessment included intentionality, reciprocity and transcendence components. Intentionality component of dynamic assessment refers to the process of mediation in which the mediator achieves in-depth insight of a learner's potential abilities. The mediator is also able to enhance learners' development by teaching simultaneously with testing (Poehner, 2008). Reciprocity component is refers to the learners' response to the instructors' mediation. Changing the learners' behaviors due to mediation allows the mediator to measure the amount and quality of intervention needed to produce potential development of learners' performance in absence of mediation. Feuerstein (2002) indicated that reciprocity focusses on the triangular relationship between the mediator, the learner and the obtained information through mediation process. Transcendence is concerns with the widening of interaction between mediator and learners beyond current point of abilities towards future potential point of learners' development (Feuerstein, 2002). Transcendence is the hurt of the mediated learning and cognitive development depend on achieving this component.

Lantolf and Poehner (2008) mentioned there are two major approaches to dynamic assessment including interactionist and interventionist approaches in which consisted of three phases: pre-test, mediation, and post-test. Poehner (2008) maintains that interactionist dynamic assessment follows Vygotsky's cooperative interaction notion. In such an approach to dynamic assessment, the interaction between mediator and learner has collaborative essence which is very sensitive to the learners' zone of proximal development. During an interactionist dynamic assessment, mediators' questions, hints or prompts are not pre-planned; instead, they emerged from mediated interaction between the mediator and the learners. The mediator responds to the learners' needs and continually re-adjusts the mediation process. The interventionist dynamic assessment is formal and standardized approach, concerned with psychometric properties of test procedures (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008). As Poehner (2008) believes during an interventionist approach, teachers follow an approach to mediation in which all prompts, hints, and leading questions have been pre-planned and arranged in a hierarchical steps. Poehner (2008) states that the distinctive feature of interventionist dynamic assessment is the use of standardized procedures and mediation in order to produce quantifiable results.

Two main models of dynamic assessment are sandwich and layer cake models. The sandwich model consists of three phases: pre-test, mediation and post-test. At first phase, learners are asked to do pre-test tasks or activities; then at second phase, they are exposed to mediation by teacher or mediator and at final phase they complete post-test tasks or activities. In the sandwich format the instruction is given between the pre-test and the post-test. The performance on the post-test is compared to the pre-test in order to determine a learners' performance progress due to the mediation. In the layer cake format mediation is given during the test administration, whenever a problem or misunderstanding occurs. In this model, learners are given a test item by item. If they answer the first item correctly, then allowed to do the second item. The assistance or mediation are graded, like layers of a cake. Methodological aspects of dynamic assessment received some criticisms. Standardization and validation of dynamic assessment have been critically questioned by some specialists (Guthke, Beckmann & Dobat, 1997). Modifiability which is the essence of dynamic assessment challenged by critics and viewed as source of threat to the test reliability. Indeed, the modifiability comprise changing of the learner's performance during assessment; on the other hand, the reliability is under threat (Bachman, 1990).

Reading comprehension takes place when cognition of words and phrases, immediate memory, background memories based on the readers' earlier experiences, interest in the reading topic and intelligence to understand of text work together appropriately. Successful reading is depend on comprehension and interpretation of texts' meaning. Many factors such as attitudes, motives, interests, curiosity, anxiety, classroom atmosphere, background knowledge, and emotional statues of learners can affect reading comprehension. Reading viewed as the most important academic language skill because reading is the basic tool for learning new information. Reading comprehension needs to get the main idea of text, to search specific information, to learn new information, to synthesize and evaluate information from texts, for general comprehension and for pleasure (Grabe & Stoller, 2001). Sellers (2000) believed that the nature of reading is complex skill because reading process comprised integration of learners' attention, perception, memory, and comprehension.

The three components of language anxiety are communication apprehension, tests anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). Sarason (1972) defined test anxiety as a tendency to drive out self-centered, interfering responses when individuals deal with testing conditions. Zeidner (1998) defined test anxiety as a phenomenological, physiological, and behavioral reaction accompany with negative consequences and failure on testing situation. Hancock (2001) defined test anxiety as a disturbing emotional phenomenon that has physiological and behavioral aspects, and that is experienced in testing or evaluation situations. Test anxiety has cognitive, social, emotional and physiological manifestation. Students' poor performance in the previous tests can potentially make them anxious so they develop a negative feeling about tests and have destructive perceptions in evaluative situations. Anxious language students are often not able to show their complete performance for a test because they forget lesson points which they studied before due to test anxiety (Hancock, 2001). Students with higher amount of test anxiety show much poor performance in their tests and evaluative situations rather than their peers with lower amount of test anxiety

(Cassady & Johnson, 2002). Test anxiety is related to students' characteristics and emotional status and appears when students exposed to high important tests frequently in which success or failure in test, highly emphasized for them.

B. Related Studies

Poehner (2008) conducted a series of extensive dynamic assessment case studies examining oral proficiency among advanced undergraduate learners of French. The study showed that due to the mediation learners' oral proficiency improved. In an experimental study, Tzurriel and Shamir (2007) dynamically mediated students' basic communication skills. The study showed that the learners in the experimental group showed higher improvement in their communicative skill than those in the control group. Hessamy and Ghaderi (2014) studied the impact of dynamic assessment on the vocabulary learning of EFL learners. The result of the study showed that using dynamic assessment as a supplementary procedure positively improved both test performance and vocabulary learning of learners. Chen (2007) investigated the relationship between test anxiety and reading anxiety on Taiwanese college students' performance in reading. Findings revealed a high correlation between test anxiety and reading anxiety. Shomoossi and Kassaian (2009) carried out a study to investigate the effect of test anxiety on listening and speaking. The results revealed that anxiety is an important factor in taking oral tests than in the listening comprehension tests.

III. METHOD

A. Participants

In this study 50 out of 66 intermediate Iranian EFL learners, males (N= 22) and females (N=28) with age range of 14 to 19 were selected from a private institute in Sari, Mazandaran based on their performance on the Oxford Placement Test (OPT). Afterwards, they were randomly divided into formative assessment and dynamic assessment groups. The learners' experience in language learning was at least 2 years. A convenience sampling procedure was conducted for the subject selection.

B. Instruments

There were two instruments in this study. The first one was an Oxford Placement Test (Syndicate, 2001). This test was applied to homogenize language learners in the present study. It comprised 60 items in two parts. These parts designed for vocabulary/grammar (40 items) and reading comprehension (20 items). The second instrument was test anxiety questionnaire developed by Sarason (1984) and revised by Benson and Bandalos (1992). The questionnaire comprised of 20 items in a Likert scale format. The researcher piloted this questionnaire and calculated its reliability by using Cronbach alpha formula in which it was about 0.77 respectively.

C. Procedure

The data of this study collected through following procedure: at first an OPT test was administered among a subject pool of 66 of all participants 50 could meet the criteria. They were randomly classified into formative and dynamic assessment groups of intermediate EFL learners which were 25 learners in each group. Next for the purpose of evaluating their test anxiety level before the instructional phase, the test anxiety questionnaire was distributed among the participants as a pre-test. They were assured for confidentiality and ethical issues for the answer they provided. Then the instruction started for the two experimental groups. 5 reading task were selected from their course book (Top Notch 2) for instruction. Both groups' reading activities were taught in the same way. For the formative group the researcher administered reading comprehension test after teaching each reading task. The researcher provides feedback for each student based on their performance on the test separately. For dynamic group the researcher used sandwich model of dynamic assessment i.e. after each reading task the researcher administered reading comprehension test as a pre-test then after collecting pre-test information, the researcher provided mediation and necessary information for answering test question generally to students. Note that the researcher did not provide any feedback to them. Finally after mediation phase the researcher re-administered the test for students as a post-test. This process repeated for each reading comprehension task. The instructional phase last 16 sessions, each one and half hours two days a week for a period of two months. All groups exposed the same material and lessons with the same teacher (the researcher), however they were different in terms of type of assessment received. For the purpose of evaluating their test anxiety level after the instructional phase, the test anxiety questionnaire was distributed among the participants as a post-test. They were assured for confidentiality and ethical issues for the answer they provided. The data were collected during a period of two weeks. After collecting the data, they were analyzed using SPSS software.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Analyzing the First Research Question

The descriptive statistics of the formative assessment pre and post-tests scores is showed in table 4.1 below. Table 4.1 shows that the mean of the formative assessment pre-test is more than the mean score of the post-test. It means that the level of test anxiety decreased (from 44.48 to 41.60).

TABLE 4.1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT GROUP

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
FA pre	25	51	23	74	44.48	3.046
FA post	25	46	24	70	41.60	2.838
Valid N (listwise)	25					

Before testing this research question, it was necessary to see whether there is normality of the distribution of the pre and post-test scores. To do this, the researcher conducted a one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

TABLE 4.2
ONE-SAMPLE KOLMOGOROV-SMIRNOV TEST OF NORMALITY

		FA pre	FA post
N		25	25
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	44.48	41.60
	Std. Deviation	15.229	14.192
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.135	.153
	Positive	.135	.153
	Negative	-.081	-.107
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.673	.766
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.756	.601

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

As indicated in table 4.2, P values were 0.756 and 0.601 respectively ($0.756 > 0.05$, $0.601 > 0.05$), so the normality of scores distribution were confirmed. Therefore, parametric test was used for means comparison. To compare the pre and post-test means, the paired samples T-test was used. Inferential statistics of the formative assessment pre and post-test scores is shown in table 4.3 below.

TABLE 4.3
PAIRED SAMPLES T-TEST FOR THE FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT GROUP

Pair 1		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
FA pre - FA post		5.369	24	.000

According table 4.3 the paired samples T-test showed that P value was ($t = 5.369$) $0.000 < 0.05$ therefore, it means that formative assessment of reading comprehension have statistically significant effect on intermediate EFL learners' test anxiety reduction.

B. Analyzing the Second Research Question

The descriptive statistics of the dynamic assessment pre and post-tests scores is showed in table 4.4 below. Table 4.4 shows that the mean of the dynamic assessment pre-test is more than the mean score of the post-test. It means that the level of test anxiety decreased (from 48.16 to 39.48).

TABLE 4.4
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF DYNAMIC ASSESSMENT GROUP

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
DA pre	25	52	23	75	48.16	3.103
DA post	25	41	22	63	39.48	2.682
Valid N (listwise)	25					

Before testing this research question, it was necessary to see whether there is normality of the distribution of the pre and post-test scores. To do this, the researcher conducted a one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

TABLE 4.5
ONE-SAMPLE KOLMOGOROV-SMIRNOV TEST OF NORMALITY

		DA pre	DA post
N		25	25
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	48.16	39.48
	Std. Deviation	15.515	13.411
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.100	.143
	Positive	.084	.143
	Negative	-.100	-.097
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.498	.714
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.966	.688

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

As indicated in table 4.5, P values were 0.966 and 0.688 respectively ($0.966 > 0.05$, $0.688 > 0.05$), so the normality of scores distribution were confirmed. Therefore, parametric test was used for means comparison. To compare the pre and post-test means, the paired samples T-test was used. Inferential statistics of the dynamic assessment pre and post-test scores is shown in table 4.6 below.

TABLE 4.6
PAIRED SAMPLES T-TEST FOR THE DYNAMIC ASSESSMENT GROUP

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1 DA pre - DA post	10.719	24	.000

According to table 4.6 the paired samples T-test showed that P value was ($t = 10.719$) $0.000 < 0.05$ therefore, it means that dynamic assessment of reading comprehension have statistically significant effect on intermediate EFL learners' test anxiety reduction.

C. Analyzing the Third Research Question

The descriptive statistics of both formative and dynamic assessments pre and post-tests scores is showed in table 4.7 below. Table 4.7 shows that the means of both formative and dynamic assessments pre-tests scores are more than the mean scores of the post-tests. It means that the level of test anxiety decreased in both cases (from 44.48 to 41.60 and 48.16 to 39.48 respectively).

TABLE 4.7
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF FORMATIVE AND DYNAMIC ASSESSMENTS GROUPS

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
FA pre	25	51	23	74	44.48	3.046
FA post	25	46	24	70	41.60	2.838
DA pre	25	52	23	75	48.16	3.103
DA post	25	41	22	63	39.48	2.682
Valid N (listwise)	25					

According to table 4.7, fluctuation of dynamic assessments' means statistically more than fluctuation of formative assessments' means. As a result, dynamic assessment of reading comprehension had more effect on intermediate EFL learners' test anxiety reduction.

D. Discussion

As mentioned earlier, the current research tried to find out the effects of formative and dynamic assessments of reading comprehension on intermediate EFL learners' test anxiety. After analyzing the data, different findings have been taken. The first finding was that formative assessment of reading comprehension has statistically significant effect on intermediate EFL learners' test anxiety reduction. The second finding of this study was that dynamic assessment of reading comprehension has statistically significant effect on intermediate EFL learners' test anxiety reduction. The third finding of this study was that dynamic assessment of reading comprehension had more effect on intermediate EFL learners' test anxiety reduction.

One of the possible reasons for these finding could be that when the students exposed to formative and dynamic assessment, they assured about the teacher attention toward their performance and it could decrease their level of anxiety. Because dynamic assessment concerns with their future development and the meditation cooperative nature makes learners more confident than the formative group learners so dynamic assessment performed better in reduction of learners' test anxiety. Another possible reason was that frequent administration of reading comprehension tests at instructional period gradually improved the learners' feeling about exam and it could reduce their level of test anxiety.

This findings support Bachman (1990) points of view that argued formative assessment has a much closer view to instruction because it results gives more feedbacks into classroom teaching process rather than summative assessment. Although formative assessment can be beneficent in language learning. Also these findings were consistent with Feuerstein, Rand and Rynders (1988) point of view which emphasized the mediated interaction between the learner and the environment, claims that in mediation learning should be implied into the process of teaching. Also the findings of this study was confirmed Cassady & Johnson (2002) which is believed that students with higher amount of test anxiety show much poor performance in their tests and evaluative situations rather than their peers with lower amount of test anxiety.

V. CONCLUSION

Regarding the results of this study the researcher concluded that both of formative and dynamic assessments of reading comprehension were effective on reducing of learners' test anxiety. Nowadays in Iran EFL context there is no sufficient emphasize on formative assessments and especially on dynamic assessments in language teaching programs. On the other hand, test anxiety is the common problematic phenomenon among Iranian EFL learners. So the researcher

recommended English language teachers and learners to include these two types of assessment in their teaching and learning programs and activities. Also syllabus designers, curriculum developers and educational policy makers can use these findings to produce more effective syllabuses and curriculum programs for English learners. Focusing on positive role of formative and especially dynamic assessment on reduction of test anxiety can help teachers and learners to overcome this troublesome phenomenon in their learning language journey.

APPENDIX. TEST ANXIETY QUESTIONNAIRE

(Developed by Sarason, 1984 and revised by Benson & Bandalos, 1992)

Below are statements that may or may not be relevant to you. Based on your personal experience, please indicate how frequently you experience these feelings or thoughts during testing situations. Please use the scale below and circle the number that best reflects how frequently you experience these responses.

Not at all typical of me = 1

Only somewhat typical of me = 2

Quite typical of me = 3

Very typical of me = 4

N	Question	1	2	3	4
1	I feel distressed and uneasy before a test.				
2	I feel jittery before tests.				
3	While taking a test, I feel tense.				
4	I am anxious about tests.				
5	I have uneasy feelings before an important test.				
6	The thought, "What happens if I fail this test?" goes through my mind during tests.				
7	During a difficult test, I worry whether I will pass it.				
8	While taking tests, I find myself thinking how much brighter other people are.				
9	After a test, I say to myself, "It's over and I did as well as I could".				
10	Thoughts of doing poorly interfere with my concentration during tests.				
11	During tests I think of how poorly I am doing.				
12	During tests I find myself thinking of things unrelated to the material being tested.				
13	I think about current events during a test.				
14	I have fantasies a few times during a test.				
15	While taking tests, I sometimes think about being somewhere else.				
16	During tests, I find I am distracted by thoughts of upcoming events.				
17	I feel the need to go to the toilet more often.				
18	I get a headache before a test.				
19	My mouth feels dry during a test.				
20	I sometimes find myself trembling before or during tests.				

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Multicultural Communication Competence and Education in Ethnic Minority Areas of Yunnan

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Abstract—Cultural diversity is evident throughout schools in border provinces of China, especially in Yunnan, which has the largest number of ethnic minorities. To what extent do teachers in Yunnan prepare their teaching to cater for the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students? Findings revealed that cultural and communicative barriers exist in Yunnan's schools, resulting in the academic underachievement of minority students. This paper integrates some external issues, such as the insufficient family education and a lack of support and understanding from schools, with internal problems, such as students' and teachers' scant knowledge in multicultural communication and the stress from psychological and behavioural adjustment during the acculturation process, into a summary as multicultural communicative and educational problems. To solve these problems, theories and practice of multicultural communication competence are introduced to meet the varied needs of students in the multicultural environment, and integrate teachers with theoretical approaches for multicultural communication education. School courses need to be updated to address the needs of students from different cultural backgrounds, and this paper also provides practical ways to begin with.

Index Terms—multicultural communication competence, ethnic minorities, multicultural education, teaching practice

I. BACKGROUND

Yunnan is a multinational border province in China, and it has the largest number of ethnic minorities in China. Many students are ethnic minorities from mountain tribes, such as Yi, Dai and Mosuo tribes. According to the data distribution in the sixth national census in 2010, the country has 56 ethnic groups while Yunnan has 52, accounting for 33.37% of the total population. Ethnic distribution was inhabited by characteristics of large and small settlements. Different nationalities with geographical differences and ethnic characteristics enjoy rich and varied ethnic cultures and life styles. China has always been a country of cultural and linguistic diversity. From the earliest of times when the ancestors of Chinese first expanded its territory to the shores, China has incorporated people from various ethnic backgrounds. The Chinese government support for the view of multiculturalism has encouraged changes to the school curriculum which promotes greater respect for, and understanding of cultural diversity.

Ethnic culture embraces the beliefs, values, ideals, customs, languages, discourses, artistic products and symbols of a group with particular reference to ethnic minority groups in a China-as-a-whole context. According to Spencer-Oatey (2008, p.3), culture is "a fuzzy set of attitudes, beliefs, behavioural conventions and basic assumptions and values that are shared by a group of people, and that influence each member's behaviour and each member's interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behaviour". The cultural expression of a minority group can be found in their customs, group memories, important tools and artefacts which can create a sense of group and community identity. The expression of people's culture can also be found in the dynamic aspects of their society, such as their language, the way in which they interact in formal and informal settings, and their lifestyles. It should be recognised that all cultures contain diversity and conflict. It should also be recognised that culture is largely socially constructed and subject to change.

Communication roots in culture, and is also the carrier of culture. Gudykunst (2000, pp. 285-286) states: "Understanding communication in any culture ... requires culture-general information (i.e. where the culture falls on the various dimensions of cultural variability) and culture-specific information (i.e. the specific cultural constructs associated with the dimension of cultural variability)". From this analytic perspective, there is little doubt about the significance of language in communication, whether as a medium or methodological tool for understanding other cultures. As Lee (1991) argues, language is a condition of culture because it is through language that one's culture is learnt and maintained. Language learning is an important issue in national education policy in China, including minority areas. China has the policy of protecting the rights and interests of ethnic minority groups to use their own dialects and writing systems, and considering interaction among different ethnic groups to be fundamental to the development of the whole area. Therefore, a multilingual education policy is being carried out by insisting on teaching students both in mandarin and in their native languages from early childhood. Normally, when minority students entered into primary schools, English learning will also be employed. However, multicultural communication is not just about language

learning, and it is better for multicultural communication be carried out according to the patterns described by Trompenaars:

...regard culture as referring to the shared assumptions, beliefs, values and norms, actions as well as artifacts and language patterns. It is an acquired body of knowledge about how to behave and shared meanings and symbols which facilitate everyone's interpretation and understanding of how to act within an organization. Culture is the unique whole, the heart and soul, that determines how a group of people will behave. (Trompenaars, 2011, p. 9)

With the problems of urbanization and people struggling to fill up the employment needs of the country, big cities in China see the movement of people inwards and people coming from diverse ethnic backgrounds and cultures. The consciousness of multiculturalism and its position in education is becoming more important in places with ethnic minorities. A conscious and persistent effort has to be made to promote understanding and respect for cultural differences, including ethnic minorities which make up an important part of population in Yunnan. This imperative was officially declared even as early as the Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional National Autonomy (1984), which emphasized the necessity to teach all students how to respect ethnic and cultural differences and to accept them as part of the cultural diversity in China's modern society. Some selected core learning outcomes in schools reflect a commitment to cultural respect and diversity: students share points of view about their own and other's cultural experiences and legends; students cooperate to find and systematically record information about the contributions of people in a variety of situations; students share their sense of belonging to a community to analyse cultural aspects that constitute their ethnic identities; students enact a collaborative performance to identify their own and others' strengths and weaknesses.

The education of multicultural communication within the Chinese landscape is only part of the story. The importance of understanding diversity worldwide is now readily accepted in many countries. Cross-cultural understanding is now a major goal of social education (Banks, 2015). In the education of multicultural communication, Ting-Toomey (1989, pp. 175-176) stresses that "... by understanding the fundamental value differences between members of all cultures, the learning styles of students from all societies, and the negotiation styles of participants in different speech communities, [that] we can better understand how members from different cultures synchronize their worldviews and modify their communication patterns to adapt and adjust to one another on both the interpersonal level and the intergroup-intercultural communication level". As qualified teachers in an environment with large number of ethnic minorities, they need to have knowledge of different cultural backgrounds, and should be interested in multicultural communication.

The objective of this study is to present issues and implications in the education of ethnic minority students in Yunnan, in order to establish a certain level of foundation for education in multicultural communication competence. We were interested in the role of educational context and how students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, attending the same school and living in the same area, perceived their education and multicultural communication in different conditions. This article will make recommendations for how to improve multicultural competency in communication, as well as in teaching, and look forward to contribute to the establishment of an educational model in ethnic minority regions in China.

II. ISSUES IN MULTICULTURAL COMMUNICATION EDUCATION IN ETHNIC MINORITY AREAS OF YUNNAN

The achievement gap in schools between ethnic minority and majority Han students has been discussed in many articles and has become a serious challenge for the national educational system. According to Berry et al.(2006), during the process of acculturation, students from ethnic minority backgrounds often experience educational underachievement. In the description of cross-cultural psychology, acculturation means individual or ethno-cultural group changes in behaviour and attitudes in the situation of multicultural communication, and it has been described as a stressful process. Schools have been considered to be the crucial context for acculturation of students from ethnic minority backgrounds. The development of multicultural communication competence of these students is thus embedded in the acculturation process, which involves their communication with others, psychological and behavioural adjustment in a multicultural environment.

Sometimes, ethnic minority students experience a lack of support and understanding by majority Han students and teachers. Minority and majority Han students in school seemed segregated and they don't mingle and play together a lot. Extra-curriculum activities intended to transfer multicultural knowledge, and boost multicultural understanding are not sufficient. According to our observation and interviews with some minority students, most of them are not enthusiastic in taking part in multicultural activities because they believe that they are treated differently in those activities. In part of Yunnan province, it is certainly true that there is an obvious pattern of ethnic segregation, including the preferences of parents to send their children to schools that cater to their language of choice and ethnic background. It of course has a detrimental effect for national integration as it does not contribute to a conducive and equal environment for people to communicate and interact with others from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

When learning a foreign language, bilinguals are more pragmatic, functional and productive than monolinguals (Jordà 2005). But in reality, ethnic minority students in Yunnan often fail in competing with Han students in English learning. Some of the reasons are as follows: different educational environments and linguistic backgrounds bring a lot of obstacles to multicultural communication. Minority students tend to accept English education as a third language

while they ignore the cultural aspects of English language. Many western cultures and customs are too alienated to be understood and not acceptable by a lot of ethnic minority families. In the classroom, students always show scant understanding and interest to many western cultural introduction. According to some interviews with minority families, I suggest that many of the parents may have a misunderstanding of the reasons for learning English. Their families believe that good English may help their children find a better job in the future, but western acculturation will have a negative influence on their career development in Chinese societies. Many minority students' ideological system were constructed by their family education in a relatively conservative way.

The development of students' language and communicative skills is imperative for academic achievement (Hakuta, 2011; Paez, 2009; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 2014). If a minority student comes to understand that their language and culture are not respected, they may begin to disassociate from school (Hakuta, 2011; Valdes, 2001; Zhou, 1997). This not only influences their own academic performance but also affects the study ambience of the whole school. Thus, it is critical to understand how students learn a third language and think about their academic success in contexts within and outside of those schools and their perceptions of which of these contexts are most conducive to them. The low English proficiency of many minority students is influenced by their low English exposure and less focus of English learning in schools of minority areas. The more exposed the learners in another language, the higher is their communicative competence. In fact, the low English proficiency is in accordance with the mindset that English is considered as a foreign language and not as a necessary universal language. Such mindset impedes the development of English proficiency of minority students in those areas.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE CONCEPT OF MULTICULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

Recent studies regards multiculturalism as an exponent, examining specific policies in the fields of education, religious practice, media, dual citizenship, minority cultural activities, bilingual education, and affirmative action (Reynolds, 2014), or evaluating cultural aspects for religious rights, cultural rights, attitudes and identities, and political representation (Colombo, 2015). Gollnick and Chinn (1990) suggest five objectives for multicultural education. These objectives also stress aspects beyond the boundaries of ethnic or racial issues. They include: i) the promotion of strength and value of cultural diversity, ii) an emphasis on human rights and respect for those who are different from oneself, iii) the acceptance of alternative life choices for people, iv) the promotion of social justice and equality for all people, and v) an emphasis on equal distribution of power and income among groups. In Fraser's (2014) words: "We should see ourselves as presented with a new intellectual and practical task: that of developing a critical theory of recognition, one that identifies and defends only those versions of the cultural politics of difference that can be coherently combined with the social politics of equality".

According to Oyewo (2000, p.157), communication is "the process of transmitting, receiving, and acting upon message/information, thoughts, ideas, attitudes and feelings through mutually agreed understandable/determined codes/symbols". This process is usually used to "inform, entertain, instruct and persuade in a given communicative encounter". The concept of communicative competence was put forward by Dell Hyme in 1972. According to Dell Hyme (1972, p.34), in language teaching, communicative competence is the capability to "use the language system appropriately in any circumstances, with regard to the functions and the varieties of language". Communicative competence requires the capability not only to know grammatical rules of a language be applied to make syntactically correct sentences, but also to know appropriate timing and occasion to use the sentences.

According to Jian (2013), in their illustration of communicative competence, Canale and Swain (1980) discuss four separate elements influencing and interacting each other as elements of communicative competence: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Their sociolinguistic competence as mentioned by Orillos (1998) is now divided into two separate pragmatic categories: functional aspects of language (illocutionary competence, or, pertaining to sending and receiving intended meanings) and sociolinguistic aspects (which deal with such considerations as politeness, formality, metaphor, register, and culturally-related aspects of language). Communicative competence refers to both language knowledge and skill when interacting with others in real situations. Grammatical competence is concerned with mastery of the language code itself. Discourse competence, the complement of grammatical competence in many ways, concerns mastery of how to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different types. Sociolinguistic competence is the knowledge of the cultural rules of language and discourse. Strategic competence, a construct that is exceedingly complex, refers to the strategies that communicators employ to initiate, terminate, maintain, repair, and redirect communication. According to D íz-Rico and Weed (2010, p.58), communicative competence is characterized of a language user's language and cultural knowledge and skills that allows the user to know "when, where, and how to use language appropriately". A competent speaker of a language knows the way to make appropriate choices of words and structures to fit the occasion in which communication occurs.

For students from different linguistic backgrounds, their interpersonal communication and relationships are strongly influenced by the language they speak. They learn to adapt their language use according to the specific situation, environment, and interpersonal dynamics with others. When interacting with friends who speak the same kind of language, minority students may prefer their native language for comfort and because they see language as a type of "code" that they share with their peers (Banks, 2015; D íz-Rico & Weed, 2010). For many ethnic minority students,

using their home language may help them feel connected to their cultures and identities (Berry, 2006; Manning & Lee, 2017; Nieto, 2002; Zhou, 1997).

School is an essential context that has significant bearing on students' development of multicultural communication competence. It is an environment that has the potential to embrace the multiple communicative skills and multicultural resources that minority students need. Therefore, it is important to teach and improve minority students' multicultural communication competence to make successful cross-cultural communication and to change their situation of underachievement in schools.

IV. SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPING STUDENTS' MULTICULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

To deal with the existing or potential difficulties that arise from teaching ethnic minority students in Yunnan, I suggest that measures should be taken to put more emphasis on multicultural communication competence, the teaching process, and the curriculum. As school did not succeed in creating a caring educational environment for all students, minority students were confronted with underachievement. Those students need to be helped to develop a positive attitude, a sense of belonging and a feeling of equality and acceptance in campus through education of multicultural communication competence.

According to Li et al. (2017), contrary to their aims and intentions, intercultural activities in school had limited effect and seemed to support the privilege of cultural majority Han students and teachers. This can be seen as a teaching practice giving advantages to ethnic majority over minority students. Therefore, multicultural activities should be designed to show no dominant or subordinate position of any specific culture, and it is better to display all the cultural elements equally. A closer appreciation of the perspectives of various cultures can enable students to develop understanding and respect for the values of others and a concern for their welfare and dignity. The main goal of multicultural language activities should be to help students develop the capability to make decisions with critical thinking so that they can solve personal and group problems and, through communicative action, influence the learning environment. Sound decisions cannot be made in a vacuum; they must be based on knowledge of multicultural communication and critical thinking. The key components of these activities should enable students to explore their own cultural identity and those of the various groups that exist in Chinese societies.

One major challenge could be in getting minority families involved in lesson planning or giving input and feedback on teaching in order to be culturally fair and inclusive (Villegas & Lucas, 2007). In many cases, teachers need to use information about minority families to adapt the curriculum and teaching procedure. However, normally not many minority parents are willing or able to take time to do so in an effective way. It is stated in China's national policy that all minority languages should and respected and maintained. This means that students will not be punished when they use their minority languages in their families and daily communication, but it is usually the case that they would feel ashamed when having to use their minority language in schools. To better understand the cultural backgrounds of students, it is important that schools take the responsibility to collaborate and communicate with their families in order to obtain as much information as possible about their cultural backgrounds and concerns. Students' parents or other relatives should be invited to schools and share or tell stories using their minority languages to the other students or families. All students have the opportunities to listen to, learn to use some of other minority languages in a supportive environment with the assistance from some teaching resources, materials. In these contexts, multilingual and multicultural resources and staffs should be available to provide relevant experiences to students in their minority languages. By gathering information from families about their cultural backgrounds and concerns, teachers can gain a better appreciation of students' experiences with their minority languages and cultures.

Although many multicultural studies do not explicitly mention language in their list of multicultural contents or as an organizing rationale, the interrelationship between language and culture has been discussed abundantly since the beginning of the 20th century. To achieve multicultural communication competence is also one of the purposes of the second language learning. Minority students will be able to surmount the cultural barriers to obtain more satisfactory results if they could express themselves in a more natural and supporting language environment (Villegas & Lucas, 2007). English learning could be carried out in a more effective way combining knowledge of language and culture. Thus, English classroom should be set multiculturally to cater to students' knowledge system. In a multicultural classroom, English can even serve as a medium of instruction to help gradually transfer from their ethnic cultures into multicultural understanding.

Celebrating "multiple intelligences" and invoking different styles of learning helps in culture-related language learning. Students will start to understand that achievements come in many different forms, and that diverse cultures should be respected and appreciated. In daily study, and in expressing their study, students may work with words, with discourses, with sounds and rhythms, with dramatic performances, with visual arts, with physical activities and sports from multicultural backgrounds. To complement oversimplified approaches, where children are directed in the "right" way to say or do in specific situations and conditions, these activities encourage students to value diversity, and provide opportunities for students from different cultural backgrounds to achieve, and for those achievements to be appreciated (Gay, 2010). The first prerequisites for education of cultural values are affirmation of individuals, and acceptance of their right to hold opinions and express them without being scoffed at for what believe at this point in time (Hill, 1994). In those multicultural activities, students are encouraged to explore and inquire about the cultural differences they

notice, and their questions are answered honestly and considerately in a way appropriate to their levels of understanding. During multicultural activities, teachers should avoid the arrogance which assumes that the majority Han culture, into which they have been initiated, is the only valid way of viewing the world for educational purpose. If varied outcomes are expected from multicultural communication, a broad basis of evaluation must be used as well. Effective evaluation depends on the teacher's ability to select the appropriate means of appraising learner progress in accordance with multicultural communication objectives.

Critical thinking skills are also an important component of the multicultural communication curriculum. It is equally important to evaluate whether or not students have developed such skills and how well they are able to use them. According to Clegg (2008), critical thinking skills are not the exclusive domain of social studies. They are essential if students are to understand appropriate cultural and social facts, concepts, and generalization. To the extent that there may be some overlap with the curriculum areas such as language arts, reading, or science, teachers should reinforce critical thinking skills that is often overlooked in many other classrooms. Students need to think about issues in classes of multicultural communication. Critical thinking does not occur in a vacuum, and it is more fruitful if the cultural issue is important to students. Important cultural issues, to which students have strong attachments and commitments, should be used frequently in classes of multicultural communication to give students opportunities to practice and reinforce their critical thinking skills. Critical thinking serves its most important purpose when it enables students to make better decisions and to take action that helps solve real problems and improve their living condition.

In addition, cooperative learning opportunities should be provided in multicultural communication activities so that students can share their common problems, objectives, tasks and joy of fulfillment with other group members. In cooperative learning, group members are interdependent. The cooperative relationship will lead to a better academic performance of each student, because in cooperative learning the mutual help will ensure that every student has grasped all the information and that the interaction among the members will become more frequent, so that learning can produce positive influence on all learners in the same group (Johnson, 1994). Students will benefit from such cooperative learning opportunities and develop some communicative competencies including respect, empathy and perspective-taking.

For structural integration of multicultural communication in schools, the practice should go beyond curricular activities towards the critical addressing of the cultural consideration of communication. Schools and teachers need to strive to create an equal and inclusive educational environment for students. This requires building class cohesion and bridging mutual understanding between minority and majority Han students, raising cultural awareness and the practice against cultural prejudices and biases. Furthermore, teachers need to take cultural diversity into account, in order to increase students' understanding of the impact of culture in communication and teaching. The objectives are to adapt teaching to students' learning needs, to provide curriculum in cultural contexts, and establish trusting and caring relationships with ethnic minority students.

V. CONCLUSION

It can be found that cultural and communicative barriers exist in education of minority areas in Yunnan province, resulting in the academic underachievement of minority students. From the analysis above, this paper integrates some external issues, such as the insufficient family education and a lack of support and understanding from schools, with internal problems, such as students' and teachers' scant knowledge in multicultural communication and the stress from psychological and behavioural adjustment during the acculturation process, into a summary as multicultural communicative and educational problems. To solve these problems, theories and practice of multicultural communication competence are introduced to meet the varied needs of students in the multicultural environment, and facilitate teaching with theories and approaches for multicultural communication education. Based on multicultural communication competence, this paper also brings forward teaching principles and strategies for both teachers and minority students.

In multicultural communication education, the goal is to cater to the needs of diverse student populations and encourage teachers to intentionally incorporate cultural consideration into their pedagogy and courses. Teachers need to change their teaching approaches to benefit a diverse range of students, and adjust to sensitive and multicultural classroom environments. The development of multicultural communication competence provides an opportunity for students to improve their academic performance and learn about a wide range of cultures and gain valuable insights into the world society. Conceptualizing multicultural communication broadly also enables teachers to select content about different cultures so that students, by comparing and contrasting them, can develop higher level concepts and generalization about different cultural aspects in China's society today.

Some solutions to the problems on developing multicultural communication competence are largely theoretical and empirical, and require teachers to make great efforts to improve their awareness in multicultural communication. Therefore, further studies on these issues should be concentrated on putting those theories into practice to check their availability and efficacy.

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A Study Tracking the Learning Status Quo of English Major Students in Normal Universities in China —Taking One of the Normal Universities in Central Region as an Example*

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Abstract—In April, 2015, the authors randomly investigated 200 English majors of grades two and three from the Faculty of International Studies at the university where the authors work, using questionnaires to study the learning status quo of English major students in normal universities in China. To understand these students' learning situations in the new era of "The Belt and Road Initiative", in April, 2017 the authors again randomly investigated 200 English major students from the above-mentioned faculty, making detailed comparison and analysis of the two investigations and putting forward some suggestions for the improvement of teaching and learning.

Index Terms—normal universities, English major students, learning status quo, tracking study

I. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The core task of higher education development is improving its quality (Kong,2001). Chinese higher education has transitioned from of large-scale expansion to a concentration on mainly improving quality. China has put forward the goal of establishing "world-class universities and world-class disciplines". Many universities and colleges take measures to achieve this goal by reforming the education of teachers, and research how to improve the teaching quality of its hardware and software. This situation ignores the research on teaching objectives to a large extent, which is not in accord with a global focus on learners in recent years. Therefore, this study aims to focus on "learning" rather than "teaching", on the basis of summarizing the related references at home and abroad, using the method of questionnaire survey and taking one of the normal universities in China's central region as an example. This study of the learning status quo of English major students in Chinese normal universities surveys and researches existing problems, and puts forward many corresponding measures.

II. RESEARCH MOTIVATION AND SIGNIFICANCE

English teaching in universities in China has always been criticized. It has been evaluated as "time-consuming but inefficient" (Du, 2017). English majors' teaching has also received a lot of criticism from society and some experts. Some university teachers, and employers outside universities, have criticized the language foundation and proficiency of English major students. For example, professor Cai Jigang wrote papers to point out many drawbacks of English majors' teaching in China (Cai,2004).

Since 2010, English as a major has been listed as the "red sign" major of the college entrance examination four times. It is also a high unemployment risk major, because its employment rate, monthly income and employment satisfaction are rather lower than comparable majors. One reason may be the oversupply of graduates as well as the fact that the quality of training does not satisfy the demand of job positions. But despite this, students have a high passion to register for English majors in recent years, especially in normal universities. So the questions why students choose English majors, how they learn, and whether these two questions are related to the quality of university students are also the focus of this research. This study not only considers theoretical approaches to teaching and learning, but also plans to improve their quality.

The authors searched the relevant references on CNKI .When taking "English majors in normal university" as the

* This paper is one of the achievements in the research on the curriculum system and content reform concerning the Chinese and foreign culture courses offered for pedagogical students of English major based on the implementation of "The Belt and Road Initiative", the provincial project of The Education Department of Henan Province presided by the author.(Project number : 2017-JSJYZD-015)

searching theme, there are 124, 108, 130, 135 and 122, amounting to 619 relevant papers respectively. Most of them are masters' papers and journals, and master's papers have a higher proportion than journals. When the authors searched the theme "research on learning status quo of English majors' students in normal universities", they found that the earliest paper was published in 2006, and the research mainly studies the ability of students' independent learning to write English. There are only 43 relevant papers in CNKI from 2006 to 2016. The authors read these papers carefully and found that they just researched either teaching or learning but not both. This paper researches both teaching and learning in Chinese academies. Therefore, to a certain extent, this paper can compensate and perfect the related research in China(Si,2016).

III. DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF INVESTIGATION AND RESEARCH

The authors selected a normal university in the central province in China; the students are from all over the country. The university is in the upper-class level of Chinese normal universities ranking, therefore this study has a certain representativeness.

A. *Subjects and Tool of the Survey*

The subjects of this survey are 200 students of English major students in the Faculty of International Studies at the University. The tool is questionnaire, and issued randomly. The investigated subjects covered all classes of two grades of English majors. The data are authentic and highly reliable. In this study, a total of 200 questionnaires were issued and 195 valid questionnaires were collected. The effective ratio of the questionnaire is 97.5%.

In order to ensure the rationality and feasibility of the design of the questionnaire, the authors carried out a pre-survey in a small range several times before issuing questionnaires formally. According to the survey results and the interviews with students, the authors adjusted the questionnaire to gain more objective and comprehensive data. In order to make the surveyed subjects treat this survey seriously and ensure the authenticity and accuracy of data, the issue, questionnaire completion and collection were conducted during lesson breaks. Before issuing the questionnaire, the authors illustrated details and explanation of each part of it. In order to ensure the accuracy of data statistics, the data statistics adopt the method of multi-person cross validation (Qu,2012).

B. *Description of Questionnaire Design*

The questionnaire is divided into two parts, the first part is the personal information of students, including grades of students, gender and age; the second part is composed of 20 questions, and divided into objective and subjective questions. Subjective questions are open questions, mainly involving the students' learning motivation; objective questions are multiple-choice questions, involving five aspects: learning state, learning concept, reading books, classroom situation, Internet surfing.

IV. THE RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION AND ITS COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The authors not only made a detailed data analysis of the investigation results, but also compared the results with those of the study completed by the author two years ago.

A. *Learning State*

1. About learning time

The time that students spend in learning is as follows, 47% of the students can guarantee the daily learning time is 1-3 hours, the time that 17% of the students spend on learning is more than 3 hours, and the time that 36% of the students spend on learning is less than one hour. In learning time, the proportion of students' learning time in different subjects is increasing. It is worth mentioning that compared with the results two years' before, the proportion of students who reported no interest in learning has declined from 5% to 0. This indicates that on the whole, students have made a considerable improvement in learning.

2. How to plan students' spare time

About spare time arrangement: 70.6% of the students recorded spending much time in doing homework and reading. This shows that most students' learning positivity and learning state have improved on the whole. In addition, about 48.4% of the students use spare time to acquire extra knowledge, and participate in all kinds of campus activities and part-time jobs. There are also some students who travel around near places at weekends, the proportion is 43.7%. It is obvious that different students have different schedules, which is directly related to factors such as gender, personal interest and so on. In contrast, students recorded the planning and arrangement of their spare time as being more rational and organized than the results two years' before, which is directly related to the growing engagement of students with their learning in the new era.

3. Issues with learning

A majority of students recorded that they found difficulty with planning time; 43% of the students lacked motivation to learn. In addition, 28.1% of the students consider that this is directly related to weak self-study ability and less scientific learning method. 9.6% of them thought that a lack of knowledge of how to learn leads to their learning troubles. The proportion of students recording suffering from learning troubles due to various factors is decreasing by

contrast. The improvement of this phenomenon is related to the increasing importance of mental health education for university students in recent years.

4. Solving learning difficulties

About 81.3% of the students solve their learning difficulties through consulting relevant books and materials; the proportion of students who take the initiative to ask for teachers or other students is 72.3%; 23.7% of the students choose to passively accept the teacher answering questions in the classroom; and only 5% of the students do not want to solve their own learning difficulties. In the last two years students have been influenced by various factors, and can adjust their learning attitude actively. This is directly related to our university's strong learning atmosphere and the increased emphasis on students' learning.

5. The completion of homework

The percentage of students who can complete homework independently is about 82%, and 27.9% of the students choose to make a differential treatment on homework of different professional courses. Only 2.1% of the students do not do homework or copy others' homework. In contrast, the percentage of the students who can do their homework independently and distinguish differently from different subjects increases by 6 percentage points and 2.3 percentage points respectively. Meanwhile, the proportion of the students who don't do homework or copy others' homework has also decreased by 1.7 percentage points.

6. Views on learning condition

Only 20.9% of the students feel very satisfied with learning condition; about 70.7% of the students are basically satisfied, but they need to seize the time to solve the problems of learning objectives that are not clear; 8.3% of the students are disappointed with their current learning situation. Even Some students report guilt and negativity. In general, more and more students recorded that be satisfied or basically satisfied with their learning.

B. Learning Concept

1. The idea and concept of language aptitude and efforts

46.5% of the students think that possessing linguistic talents does not necessarily lead to competent language learning. This result shows that they do not agree there is a relationship between language aptitude and learning English well. 53.5% of the students think that hard work plays an important and even decisive role in foreign language learning. This shows that more and more students think that after hard work, English can be learned well.

2. Strategy and concept of learning management

82.5% of the students think that the effective use of management strategies plays an important role in learning a foreign language. It is vital to have long-term and short-term learning goals to learn foreign languages. At the same time, they think that students should apply what they have learned about learning positivity and management to their own situations, and need to constantly sum up their own progress and identify their problems with learning, and reconsider whether their own learning methods are effective. This shows that most of the students have an active learning awareness. In contrast, the students studied appear able to use the learning management strategies better and more scientifically, which has a direct relationship with the education of newly enrolled students.

3. Native concept, formal training concept and function training concept

45% of the students think that they can not understand texts through translation, because it is not a good way to learn a foreign language. 55.6% of the students think in order to learn and improve foreign language, you need to regard Chinese as the intermediary in order to do listening, speaking and writing practice. With regards to how to improve their practice, 87.6% of the students think that repeated practice can improve listening and speaking abilities. With regards to functional practice, the high grade students show more confidence in its importance than the low grade students. This shows that both the concept of formal practice and functional practice can improve the students' English ability(Zhang,2015).

C. Reading Books

1. The frequency of going to the library every week

70.1% of the students reported that they went to the library every week, and 39.9% of the students go to the library quite frequently, about 4 to 5 times a week. In contrast, more students go to the library to read and consult some related books more frequently.

2. Extracurricular books reading

70.9% of the students reported choosing literary works; 63.2% of the students choose textbooks and professional books. 35.1% of them are interested in literature, history, philosophy, psychology and other related books. Students read more and more books, and the scope of knowledge involved is becoming more and more extensive.

3. The quantity of reading professional books per semester

57.5% of the students reported reading 1 to 2 professionally related books, but the proportion of students who never read professional books is 24.3%, and the number of students who reported reading read three or more professional books account for 25.8%. In the field of reading professional books, more students are learning their professional knowledge more thoroughly and comprehensively than before. This can improve their employment competitiveness greatly (Zhang,2015).

D. *Situation in Classroom*

1. Problems in the classroom

38.9% of the students think that the atmosphere of some teachers' lessons is rather boring, which causes that their learning interest and listening efficiency to greatly decrease. 21.1% of the students think that knowledge lectured on by teachers lacks an authoritative basis. In the last two years, with the continuous improvement of teaching quality and teaching reform, however, the teachers in this university have also paid more attention to the establishment of effective organization and knowledge system in classroom teaching. So fewer and fewer students feel bored during classes.

2. The situation of being late, leaving early and absence from lessons

27.8% of the students think that these situations can be understood. But 72.2% of the students disagree with this view. They believe that these practices not only disrespect teachers, but also disrupt the normal order of the classroom. In comparison, more and more students have recorded being able to respect their teachers.

3. The main reasons for skipping class

67.4% of the students reported lacking learning motivation; 52.3% of the students have different opinions on the teaching methods of teachers. 35.4% of students choose to skip class because of participating in campus activities. 25.7% of the students are weary of studying. 16.9% of students are addicted to online games. It is worth mentioning that boys have a large proportion in skipping classes.

4. The situation of the surrounding students being late

About 97.8% of the students think that all the students in the class are quite punctual. They always arrive at the classroom 5 to 10 minutes in advance. And 2.2% of the students could be late occasionally. With the development of the learning atmosphere and strictness of the discipline, the phenomenon of student's being late has been improved despite the occasional lateness of individual students.

5. The view of checking class attendance

78.2% of the reported being in favor of the teachers or the monitor checking the attendance before class or during the break time between classes. They think this way can play a supervised role in a larger extent. But 21.8% of the students think that checking class is not necessary, and class attendance should be governed by students own conscientiousness. Most of students support to check attendance before class or during break time. This indicates that most students in this university have been more and more in favor of the importance of the discipline of checking attendance (Zhang, 2015).

E. *Internet Use*

1. The time of using Internet in daily life

93.9% of the students reported being able to limit their daily internet use to within two hours; 6.1% of the students spend 3 hours or even more on Internet. This compares favorably with the situation two years previously, with more students now reporting increased participation in activities in campus, consulting and reading professional books in the library, so students have been able to arrange their spare time and control the time of using Internet reasonably in recent two years. They also report that self-control have been quite strengthened.

2. Situation of the purpose on using the Internet

65.5% of the students use the Internet to find relevant and other aspects of learning material; 47.8% of the students need to use the Internet to browse news for personal interest. But the students who regarded Using the internet as recreational decreased significantly, accounting for 55.6%, and this cohort of students is mainly practicing English listening and speaking through watching US TV series, listening to English songs and films etc. Over the past two years, the main purpose of using the internet is mostly searching materials related to English. This indicates that students' ability to collect material and conduct scientific research has improved greatly.

F. *Learning Motivation*

There are a number of research studies in this field. In Gardner's (1985) opinion, motivation consists of three factors: the desire to language learning, the attitude to language learning, and the intensity of motivation (Gardner, 1985). The authors reorganized and summarized according to answers, and conducted a careful and detailed analysis of these answers. The result shows that the higher grade students' internal interest in English learning motivation is better than the lower grade students, which indicates that students' interest in learning English can be improved with increased understanding of language itself and the culture of English-speaking countries. Besides, there is an increasing trend in the motivation of language learning in order to travel abroad. Some students have had plans and goals for going abroad since the being freshmen. Their motivation for English learning is also becoming more and more important as the motivation of going abroad is becoming clearer and clearer (Zhou, 2011).

V. ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' LEARNING PROBLEMS

A. *As Reported by Students*

First, there are significant differences in reporting language learning difficulties according to students' gender in normal universities.. The results of the survey show that girls are better than boys in their attitudes, and learning status. This is because in terms of language learning, female students have a gender advantage over male students as a whole. Secondly, there are slight differences among different grades of the students in their spare time planning, learning

troubles and reading books. This result is mainly due to the time it takes for students to adapt to new life after going to university, and understand the pressure of future employment gradually. Thirdly, most college students are influenced by the thought formed in senior high school, which is mainly due to the different ways of thinking taught by the science and liberal arts curricula, and which have a great influence on their career planning in future. Finally, there is an important additional factor: the impact of different families' economic and social status. University students in a high socioeconomic status families are better than those of lower status in solving learning difficulties, learning goals setting and class attendance. This is mainly related to the degree of their parents' education and family attitudes towards learning(Sun,2016).

B. As Reported by Teachers

University students' satisfactions in learning and towards teachers are closely related to the teaching methods used by teachers. The students are more dissatisfied with the traditional teaching mode, and value alternative teaching methods, for example, those which promote independent, cooperative and experiential learning.

C. As Reported by Society

To a certain extent, the differences of economic development between urban and rural areas will have a decisive impact on the quality of teachers, the hardware and software of schools, and the learning environment of students. Furthermore, the level of economic development will have an effect on differences between urban and rural education environment. To be specific, university students from cities are more skilled in independent inquiry than students from rural areas; this has direct relationship with attention on quality education and the quality of the degree (Sun,2016).

VI. FEASIBLE MEASURES TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' LEARNING STATUS QUO

A. Improving Students' Levels of Attainment: Students' Perspectives

1. Enhancing Internal motivation to learn

The results of this study suggest that students should focus on cooperative learning and inquiry learning, feel the changes in learning and life by the variety of inquiry activities. This will stimulate their inner passion, enhance their motivation of internal interest, cultivate their interest in English language and culture, and help them to love learning English.

2. To adjust actively the way of learning

Our study recommends that students should combine their own learning characteristics with professional learning rules, actively transform their learning concepts, lay emphasis on independent learning and adopt more scientific and efficient learning ways.

B. Improving Student Attainment: Teachers' Perspectives

1. To improve the teaching model and stimulate the enthusiasm of students' participation.

In the classroom teaching, teachers should actively create inquiry learning situations that are helpful for university students to participate in, which can make students feel the pleasure of the learning process personally, and stimulate universities students' learning enthusiasm, especially the students from rural areas. At the same time, teachers should also strengthen the guidance for universities students, actively encourage and cultivate students' scientific research consciousness and ability.

2.To increase the humanistic care for the disadvantaged universities students and make a real "Good Teacher and Helpful Friend"

Teachers should focus on the deepening and implementation of teaching reform, and change their previous teaching modes. In the teaching process, teachers should teach students in accordance with their aptitude. Specifically, teachers should take the initiative to gain information regarding their students' social and economic situations. If the majority is from the city, the teacher should highlight cooperative learning in the teaching process; but if the majority comes from the rural areas, it is necessary to put more emphasis on inquiry learning in the teaching process, and pay attention to giving guidance at the same time. In addition, for the students with special characteristics, teachers should give more humanistic care, so that "no one student is left behind".

C. Improving Student Attainment: University Management Perspectives

1. To set up a variety of courses in accordance with the development of the era and society

The universities' educational administration department should set courses scientifically and reasonably in accordance with the different learning characteristics of all colleges and majors, and increase the proportion of elective courses. For example, adding related courses, in order to satisfy students' interest in English learning; creating better learning atmosphere is able to promote students to learn independently. At the same time, extending the elective lessons into extracurricular activities and social practice(Lv,2012).

2. To strengthen the service consciousness of teachers

In order to improve education quality, universities should take feasible measures to improve students' learning satisfaction. The universities authorities should pay close attention to collective and sorting students' opinions and

suggestions, using effective and targeted research. Secondly, university managers should guide students to participate in research projects, adhere to the principle that ‘students are the main part of learning’, attach importance to the cultivation and development of students’ potential, thereby achieving respect for students in a real sense. Finally, university managers should pay attention to the construction of systems in university and perfecting systems to evaluate teachers, promoting teachers can gain more excellent teaching skills and levels, which helps to change students’ learning methods and education quality will improve.

VII. CONCLUSION

This paper has tracked attitudes to and achievements in learning of a group of English majors in a Chinese normal university. The authors have obtained detailed first-hand survey data, and through the analysis of the data, especially compared with data obtained two years previously, we can see that the students how students learn, how they conceptualize learning, the number of books they read, their class attendance plus their use of the internet: all these have changed compared with compared with two years ago. There are, however, some problems which have not changed and which have not been effectively resolved. That this is so is not only related to how students learn and conceptualize learning, but also to the fact that teachers are still not paying sufficient attention to studies of students’ learning. In order to change and optimize the status quo of students’ learning fundamentally, society, universities and teachers should also update the curriculum, their concept of what teaching is as well as teaching methods. But the most fundamental need is to strengthen the students’ learning motivation and help students learn to learn.

This research has only investigated students in one university, the sample data quantity is not enough. Because the survey of teachers has not been conducted, so it is hard to find out whole problems in teaching and learning of English majors. Nevertheless, the authors hope that this research can bring some references and inspirations to our university teachers and managers, and hope this study can arouse more scholars to pay more attention to students “learning”. After all, students are the subject of learning. The improvement of the teaching quality we expect still depends on students’ love for learning and their ability to learn.

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Rob Hardy obtained his BA in English from Cambridge University and his MA and PhD degrees from Cardiff University. He was formerly the Assistant Principal for Higher Education at the Bournemouth and Poole College, and now divides his time between China and the UK, teaching and researching.

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Call for Papers and Special Issue Proposals

Aims and Scope

Theory and Practice in Language Studies (TPLS) is a peer-reviewed international journal dedicated to promoting scholarly exchange among teachers and researchers in the field of language studies. The journal is published monthly.

TPLS carries original, full-length articles and short research notes that reflect the latest developments and advances in both theoretical and practical aspects of language teaching and learning. We particularly encourage articles that share an interdisciplinary orientation, articles that bridge the gap between theory and practice, and articles in new and emerging areas of research that reflect the challenges faced today.

Areas of interest include: language education, language teaching methodologies, language acquisition, bilingualism, literacy, language representation, language assessment, language education policies, applied linguistics, as well as language studies and other related disciplines: psychology, linguistics, pragmatics, cognitive science, neuroscience, ethnography, sociolinguistics, sociology, and anthropology, literature, phonetics, phonology, and morphology.

Special Issue Guidelines

Special issues feature specifically aimed and targeted topics of interest contributed by authors responding to a particular Call for Papers or by invitation, edited by guest editor(s). We encourage you to submit proposals for creating special issues in areas that are of interest to the Journal. Preference will be given to proposals that cover some unique aspect of the technology and ones that include subjects that are timely and useful to the readers of the Journal. A Special Issue is typically made of 15 to 30 papers, with each paper 8 to 12 pages of length.

A special issue can also be proposed for selected top papers of a conference/workshop. In this case, the special issue is usually released in association with the committee members of the conference/workshop like general chairs and/or program chairs who are appointed as the Guest Editors of the Special Issue.

The following information should be included as part of the proposal:

- Proposed title for the Special Issue
- Description of the topic area to be focused upon and justification
- Review process for the selection and rejection of papers
- Name, contact, position, affiliation, and biography of the Guest Editor(s)
- List of potential reviewers if available
- Potential authors to the issue if available
- Estimated number of papers to accept to the special issue
- Tentative time-table for the call for papers and reviews, including
 - Submission of extended version
 - Notification of acceptance
 - Final submission due
 - Time to deliver final package to the publisher

If the proposal is for selected papers of a conference/workshop, the following information should be included as part of the proposal as well:

- The name of the conference/workshop, and the URL of the event.
- A brief description of the technical issues that the conference/workshop addresses, highlighting the relevance for the journal.
- A brief description of the event, including: number of submitted and accepted papers, and number of attendees. If these numbers are not yet available, please refer to previous events. First time conference/workshops, please report the estimated figures.
- Publisher and indexing of the conference proceedings.

If a proposal is accepted, the guest editor will be responsible for:

- Preparing the “Call for Papers” to be included on the Journal’s Web site.
- Distribution of the Call for Papers broadly to various mailing lists and sites.
- Getting submissions, arranging review process, making decisions, and carrying out all correspondence with the authors. Authors should be informed the Author Guide.
- Providing us the completed and approved final versions of the papers formatted in the Journal’s style, together with all authors’ contact information.
- Writing a one- or two-page introductory editorial to be published in the Special Issue.

More information is available on the web site at <http://www.academypublication.com/tpls/>

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