Experiences of Female Chinese University Students in Japan: A Diary Study with a Grounded Theory Approach

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Abstract

The focus of this study is to explore the relationship between the linguistic and cultural learning processes that four female Chinese university exchange students perceived in Japan over one academic year. Two data collection instruments were employed: participants' diary entries and follow-up interviews with the four participants during the study-abroad period. A grounded theory approach was employed for data analysis. The main finding was that none of the Chinese sojourners' experiences during their study abroad represented the models of conceptualizing adaptive changes (Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg 1960). Furthermore, at a linguistic level, the sojourners experienced language shock at the initial arrival stage while at the cultural level, they came to develop negative attitudes towards their hosts over time. In the perceptions of linguistically- and culturally-specific restructuring processes in the host environment, with the impact of rich formal classroom instruction and learning in the home country, the sojourners were constructing dual identities negotiated with age and gender (cf. Ting-Toomey, 2005). On one level, they wished to celebrate their youth with hosts of the same generation by becoming involved in similar linguistic usage. On another, they wanted to behave in a polite manner like elderly women at linguistic and cultural levels. This study also discusses theoretical implications for diaries as a base research tool and methodological implications for future research.

Keywords: diary study, follow-up interview, grounded theory approach, learning process, identity.

Introduction

There are growing numbers of sojourners, immigrants or refugees across national boundaries in search of academic or professional careers or seeking political or material stability in Japan. This is due to greater economic growth since the 1980s (Gottlieb, 2005; see also Arli et al., 2023) as well as the government's immigration policy, which allows ethnic Japanese of other nationalities to work and which promotes the settlement of Chinese war orphans and refugees from South-east Asia (Kanno, 2004). At the same time, however, this multicultural tide and the diversity of the interaction in contact situations (cf. Fan, 1994) between native speakers and non-native speakers demand in-depth studies of the multiple aspects of communication problems and the process of negotiating adaptation to the host culture. Neustupný (1985) claimed that "we now are more interested in what it is that happens in a particular contact situation or in contact situations in general" (p. 161). Moreover, these significant features of multiculturalism, which have brought about wide-ranging changes in Japanese society, can also be identified in educational domains such as universities.

With regard to tertiary-level institutions, it is often claimed that the host environments offer sojourners rich opportunities for social interactions with local students or others that facilitate both linguistic and cultural learning. However, much empirical research to date in the context of second language (L2) learning have focused largely on the development of linguistic aspects and not the cultural aspects, while studies of cross-cultural adaptation to the host community have made light of exploring linguistic aspects that affect sociocultural adjustment. Masgoret and Ward (2006) stressed that few studies have focused on the relationships between variables relating to L2 acquisition and cultural learning. Therefore, the inter-disciplinary perspective of both L2 learning or acquisition and cross-cultural adaptation is essential to achieve a more comprehensive and accurate explanation of study abroad experiences (Jackson, 2010). Moreover, much of the previous research has inclined heavily towards either foreign language (FL) learning in the learners' home country or in the L2 classroom learning in the target community. As Asada (2014, see also 2018) claimed, these studies often overlook the characteristics of university exchange students (like the ones who participated in this study) who have received rich formal FL instruction prior to studying abroad, and are then submersed in an informal L2 speech community. Restated, researchers need to consider how and in what contexts normative knowledge and skills that sojourners have developed through formal instruction and learning in the FL classroom at their home universities would impact informal L2 learning in the host community. This led to the author's earlier research (Asada, 2014) to better understand the interwoven, complex relationship between linguistic and cultural learning processes that female Chinese university exchange students perceived in Japan over one academic year. The current study sought to build on previous research by focusing more on the methodological issues of diary studies and follow-up interviews from four female Chinese participants, and also with analytical procedures using a grounded theory approach.

Variables in Study Abroad Contexts

It is often the case that sojourners, with a higher willingness to communicate and higher levels of L2 proficiency prior to studying abroad, may seek more opportunities to interact with locals in the target community (Churchill & DuFon, 2006). However, more light needs to be shed on the relationships between the motivational, attitudinal and communicative aspects of these sojourners, as well as the learning environment in the host country (cf. Jackson, 2016). In tertiary level institutions of study abroad contexts in Japan, the majority of sojourners are Chinese and others are mostly from South-east Asia. This statistically-unbalanced trend derives from sensitive issues in the political and economic sense. Historically, Japan instigated wars with neighboring countries and this took a heavy toll in

terms of human lives. Presumably, people from these regions have been socialized more or less with anti-Japanese education in their home countries. This could interfere with sojourners' willingness to communicate with hosts, as Imahori and Cupach (2005) pointed out:

> Stereotyping is also commonly experienced in intercultural relationships. People may not only see each other as members of their respective cultures, but also try to interact with each other based on beliefs about each other's culture. Such stereotyping ignores the unique characteristics of an individual and forces a person into a predefined category. (p. 200)

With the rapid growth of Japan's economy, on the other hand, language has been regarded as "a symbol of economic power" (Gottlieb, 2005) that increases the prospect of employment in business or other types of professional domains. This materialistic perception of the relationships between language and power may encourage instrumental motivation (Dornyei, 2001) in Asian youth that may drive them to learn JFL (Japanese as a FL) and/or JSL (Japanese as an L2) in spite of the strong sense of nationalism against Japan. Although integrative motivation (Dornyei, 2001) is also a psychologically powerful factor influencing the processes of linguistic and cultural learning, particularly for Asian sojourners (cf. Jiang & Altinyelken, 2022; see also Chudnovskaya & Millette, 2023), actual situations leave little room for optimism in a "closed" Japanese society. For example, human beings generally tend to base their categorizations of others on their skin color, dress, or accents (Clark & Marshall, 1981). Kim (2005) assumed that having only low degrees of extrinsic and intrinsic ethnic markers which an individual shares with the hosts serves as "a kind of handicap in his or her adaptive effort" (p. 389). Kanno (2004) also claimed that in a Western context, "physiognomic differences – that is, being a visible minority – limit minority students' ability to assimilate: no matter how much they wish to be the same as the dominant group, their physical features mark them as different" (p. 331). These arguments naturally indicate that Asian sojourners who share similar extrinsic ethnic markers or physical appearances with Japanese natives are welcomed in the host community. Maruyama (1998) reported, however, that the hosts in Japan show lower levels of tolerance towards sojourners from Asian regions than their Western counterparts who are regarded as "nice" foreigners (cf. Iino, 2006), and thus they are less psychologically adapted to the host environment across time. Lower levels of host receptivity towards Asian sojourners might be partly due to a historically and economically driven sense of superiority which Japanese natives have towards other Asian countries, while also favoring Western cultures.

In addition to cultural and ethnic backgrounds, age and gender also play vital roles that affect communicative, motivational and attitudinal aspects (Churchill, 2009; Kinginger, 2013). Patron (2007) assumed that "the younger the sojourner the greater the likelihood of cultural identity assimilation to the host environment" (p. 27). Churchill and DuFon (2006), on the other hand, illustrated some studies that focused on harassment faced by women in study abroad contexts. These studies show that negative gender-related practices can result in withdrawal of learners' active participation in interactions with hosts and less investment in linguistic and cultural learning (cf. Kinginger, 2009). It is also important to note, however, that other women face different challenges in adjusting to gender-related differences and norms, and construct their sense of identity in different ways (Norton, 2000). Siegal (1996) argued that female learners of Japanese created their own language system based on their perceptions of Japanese women, those of women's language, and their social position while in Japan. Interestingly, Iino (2006) also pointed out that in a Japanese host family environment, "non-native speakers are not always expected by native speakers to speak and behave like a native, and at the same time non-native speakers themselves may not wish to speak and behave like a native" (p. 171). Careful investigation is thus needed by focusing on the way in which a linguistic or cultural identity of the self is perceived in this study.

As discussed so far, the complex web of variables such as the motivational, attitudinal and communicative aspects of sojourners, as well as the learning environment in the target community would affect their experiences in study abroad contexts. Restated, it is likely that individual variables and situational contexts in the host culture (cf. Goldoni, 2018) have potential effects on sojourners' linguistic and cultural learning during their study abroad. More importantly, the learning processes are complex and dynamic. Churchill and DuFon (2006) claimed that "the relationship between learners' engagement with the host context on the one hand, and increased motivation and proficiency and lower levels of anxiety on the other is not unidirectional, but rather mutually constituted" (p. 18). Contrastingly, Gudykunst (2005) argued,

> We can feel adjusted even when our behavior in the host culture is not effective or appropriate to the host culture. It also is possible for strangers to develop ways of coping in the host culture that do not involve much social interaction with host nationals. (p. 424)

It is thus valuable to investigate, with the knowledge and skills which female Chinese university students have been instructed in formal FL classroom learning in their home country the relationships among individual variables such as interaction, motivation, attitude and identity, which are highly subjective, in linguistic and cultural learning processes where they are involved in study abroad contexts. In a practical sense, the findings of this study would provide some insights into JFL education that places more focus on grammar- or textbook-based instruction. The next section overviews theoretical issues in diary studies that were employed for this study.

Theoretical Implications for Diary Study

There are a number of issues to be considered with benefits and drawbacks in the application of diaries as a base research tool for this longitudinal and exploratory study. Diary studies have long earned respect in disciplinary fields such as sociology or language education. McDonough and McDonough (1997) claimed that "the diary has become increasingly significant both as a reflective genre in itself, and as one of a battery of interpretive micro-ethnographic research techniques" (p. 121). This ethnographic method offers closer access to capturing participants' perceptions of learning processes from their own perspectives during their study abroad experience. Bailey and Ochsner (1983) argued:

> A diary study in second language learning, acquisition, or teaching is an account of a second language experience as recorded in a first-person journal. The diarist may be a language teacher or a language learner – but the central characteristic of the diary studies is that they are introspective: the diarist studies his own teaching or learning. Thus, he can report on affective factors, language learning strategies, and his own perceptions – facets of the language learning experience which are normally hidden or largely inaccessible to an external observer. (p. 189)

Nunan (1992), with claims that "one of the problems confronting language researchers is that a great deal of the hard work involved in language development and use is invisible, going on in the head of the learner" (p. 115), also places high value on diary studies as one of the introspective methods to derive insights into the cognitive processes underlying observable behavior. On the other hand, diary studies have advantages as process research whose data are collected and analyzed on a longitudinal basis. McDonough and McDonough (1997) claimed that "diaries are best written over an extended period, and "snapshot" extracts cannot capture changes over time which can often be very marked,

so any one segment belongs organically in a broader temporal and contextual picture" (pp. 122–123). They continued:

> The diary, it is argued, is a primary vehicle for process research, for getting under the skin of the psychological, social and affective factors involved in teaching or in language development in ways that cannot readily be reached by staff meetings or tests or population sampling or experiments. (p. 135)

Matsumoto (1987) stressed that the major strength of the diary study as process research "lies in its holistic, hypothesis-generating, and naturalistic characteristics" (p. 17). Stated in detail:

> While product-oriented experimental studies allow for investigating only one or a few pre-selected aspects of the second language learning experience at one time, process-oriented ethnographic studies such as the diary study enable researchers to investigate all aspects of the classroom language experience over a period of time. (pp. 24–25)

She continued, "it is exploratory and creative in the sense that it not only generates new hypotheses concerning SLA but discovers new variables playing important roles in classroom language learning or teaching" (p. 25). Although these arguments for the diary study mentioned so far largely refer to L2 learning or acquisition (cf. Plews et al., 2023 for the latest issues), this holistic, introspective method, particularly as process research, would contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of sojourners' cultural as well as linguistic learning during study abroad.

However, diary studies have some limitations as data collection instruments. Firstly, diary writing represents additional load on long-term memory in relation to the lapse of time between the events and the recording. Fry (1988) claimed that "the longer this time is the greater the load on memory capacity, and therefore the greater the likelihood of a report being a piecemeal and edited account of the event" (p. 160). McDonough and McDonough (1997) claimed that "as with any kind of autobiographical memory, there is likely to be some decay in accuracy over time, at least as far as factual logging of activities is concerned" (p. 124). Fry (1988) also pointed out that a lack of consistency in terms of time (the data is collected at a fixed time after the events) and in terms of depth (the data is recorded in detail) diminishes the reliability of the data. In response to this limitation of diary writing, the current researcher asked participants to keep regular diaries on a longitudinal basis and further explored their reflective perceptions in diary entries with follow-up interviews.

Secondly, the diary data may not necessarily provide a clear picture of the mental processes that determine one's behavior. Bailey and Nunan (1996) argued that "language learning involves both conscious and unconscious processes, but only those occurring within a learner's conscious awareness are available to be scrutinized . . . and of those, presumably only some unspecified subset will be discussed by the diarist" (p. 199). Bailey (1991) also argued:

> We do not know how many or which of these language learning processes operate within learners' conscious awareness and are therefore available as objects of introspection. In the case of the diary studies, those language learning processes which learners actually choose to write about are potentially a smaller group than are all the conscious processes which learners might write about, and this subset of conscious processes is presumably smaller than the entire range of language learning processes, both conscious and unconscious, which influence second language acquisition. (p. 80 underlines original)

Similarly, Fry (1988) claimed that "the act of recording aspects of learning behaviour will raise consciousness of that behaviour and may change it" (p. 161). In this respect, the present researcher employed a grounded theory approach, conceptualizing information shown in data for diaries with follow-up interviews, so that he demonstrated an overall picture of participants' learning processes.

It is also important to consider, particularly in non-participant studies by subjects as diarists (Brown, 1985), how researcher-intervention influences the validity of diary data. McDonough and McDonough (1997) claimed:

> The diary is self-evidently subjective and introspective where the perspective of the 'I' dominates, and this includes filtering the assumed and reported attitudes of others. However, the nature and focus of this introspection may well differ depending on whether the self is the sole intended addressee as in the most free styles of diary-keeping, or alternatively a researcher . . . who has provided some guidelines for writing with a specific line of investigation in mind. (p. 124)

Fry (1988) also stressed:

> Even where researchers intend to limit the dangers of subjects' editing of data by remaining inexplicit about the goals of their research, there is still the danger that subjects will try to guess these intentions and provide what they think the researcher is after or simply try to show themselves in a good light. (p. 161)

Similarly, Matsumoto (1987) pointed out that "the subject-diarists, being conscious of the researcher's judgments of what they have written, will write only those things desirable or not detrimental to the teacher, institution, classmates, etc." (p. 31). In response to these critiques, the present researcher provided participants with a loose topic for regular diary-keeping and also tried to encourage them to write comfortably and openly.

Finally, it has been criticized that the individualistic and subjective nature of diary data usually includes only a small number of samples. Nunan (1992) mentioned that "in terms of external validity, critics of the method ask how conclusions based on data from a single subject can possibly be extrapolated to other language learners" (p. 123). Matsumoto (1987) similarly concluded that "usually the diary study deals with an individual's language acquisition taking place in a unique environment, which makes it impossible to generalize findings to other learners and other learning environments – results may be totally idiosyncratic" (p. 27). Bailey (1991) also argued that "diaries involve subjective data, based entirely on the learners' perceptions of their experiences. They are by no means objective reports, and objectivity is one of the desired hallmarks of experimental research" (p. 79). Certainly, diary studies usually deal with small numbers of informants. This is because of the exploratory and interpretive nature of the research that they are employed in. As Bailey and Ochsner (1983) asserted, "diary studies, when we view them as individual reports, offer different insights into the largely unobservable processes of second language learning and teaching" (p. 191). It is this kind of research that could potentially uncover how differently sojourners perceive their learning processes with different variables in study abroad contexts. Furthermore, overall arguments showed drawbacks as well as benefits in the application of diaries as a base research tool. On the other hand, this researcher employed a grounded theory approach as an analytic tool so as to explore the complex relationships among the individual variables that appeared in the sojourners' study abroad experiences.

Research Design

Since longitudinal and exploratory research allows a more in-depth analysis of sojourners' life experiences in study abroad contexts, a year-long diary account of the participants was used to explore their perceptions in the processes of linguistic and cultural learning in a host institutional context. The qualitative dataset was analyzed with a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Kinoshita, 2003) to highlight the similarities and differences for conceptualization and categorization across the data.

Participants

The participants in this study were four female Chinese exchange students (abbreviated as P1, P2, P3 and P4 hereafter), aged between 19 and 21, enrolled at the host women's university in Japan over one academic year. They were all majoring in Japanese and had received formal JFL classroom instruction at their home university in China for approximately 1.5 years. All had formally been trained mostly by native Chinese teachers and had had little contact with other native Japanese speakers inside and out of China. The participants were immersed in regular lectures with a small extent of JSL classroom learning at the host university. They were at an intermediate level, as measured by the Japanese Language Proficiency Test when the data collection of this study began.

Data Collection

Data sources consisted of diary entries supplemented with follow-up interviews. For the diary studies, the participants were asked to keep weekly diaries on A4-sized paper in Japanese, with topics that included activities on and off campus with a range of foci such as on language and cultural learning (cf. Dressler et al., 2022). The diaries were collected each week throughout one academic year, and 34 diary entries (abbreviated as D1…D34 hereafter) from each participant, writing a half to one page each, were used in this study. To ensure validity and reliability of the data collection, the present researcher avoided correcting participants' diaries and adding evaluative comments so as to minimize his influence on the exploratory nature of diary data (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). On the other hand, however, the researcher explained thoroughly the potential benefits of diary-keeping, specifically in raising participants' self-awareness for learning and in developing their L2 proficiency (Fry, 1988; Matsumoto, 1987).

In order to clarify salient issues that emerged from their diaries, asking general questions how and in what contexts participants' accounts reflected their experiences (e.g., What do you mean by this?, Can you explain by this?) – and respond appropriately to the aforementioned drawbacks of diary studies generally – follow-up interviews (abbreviated as FiD1…FiD34 hereafter) were conducted in Japanese, lasting 30 minutes with each participant at several points during the data collection of diary entries. Fontana and Frey (2000) referred to multiple research methods:

> Human beings are complex, and their lives are ever changing; the more methods we use
> to study them, the better our chances to gain some understanding of how they construct
> their lives and the stories they tell us about them. (p. 668)

As for the follow-up interviews, Glesne (1999) claimed the strength of interviewing as "the opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see" (p. 69). Therefore, the follow-up interviews in this study were employed basically to explore in greater depth salient issues that emerged in the participants' diary entries, in uncovering their perceptions which are hidden under the surface of written forms. To ensure validity and reliability for the follow-up

interviews, the present researcher attempted to build "rapport" (Krathwohl, 1998) with the participants: a close personal relationship with them so as to maximize the potential of the interviewing during the data collection on the one hand, while maintaining his academic role as a researcher on the other (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

Data Analysis

A grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was employed to analyze qualitative data (diary entries supplemented with follow-up interviews) and to construct a comprehensive theory around the life experiences of the participants during their study abroad. Throughout this process, the present researcher was involved in developing the related concepts/categories and interpreting the relationships between/among them in constant comparative analysis.

Firstly, the data for diaries with follow-up interviews were analyzed, using a quantitative analytic approach (Allwright & Bailey, 1991) in an exploratory quantitative-qualitative sequence (cf. Kinginger & Schrauf, 2023) that followed a grounded theory approach. In detail, salient issues appearing in the diary entries with follow-up interviews for each of the participants were vertically analyzed according to the order of frequency of mention so as to identify common variables or patterns across them. This quantitative analytic approach identified 43 issues for P1, 30 issues for P2, 59 issues for P3, and 49 issues for P4, and then a total 107 issues across all participants according to the order of frequency of mention were classified into language (verbal)-related (e.g., authentic Japanese), language (non-verbal)-related (e.g., reacting to jokes), culture (people)-related (e.g., vagueness) or culture (society)-related (e.g., traffic rules) groups.

Secondly, in order to explore the relationships of variables and patterns identified in this quantitative analysis, participants' excerpts with follow-up interviews were horizontally reexamined in depth with a grounded theory approach (cf. Kinoshita, 2003; see also Sozen & Hakyemez-Paul, 2023). This qualitative analysis followed open, axial and selective coding at three levels for conceptualization and categorization of data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; see also Glesne, 1999). As for the initial stage of open coding, issues (codes) that were related (or not related) were examined in comparative analysis and led to formulating 14 concepts (e.g., attachment to female elders). For the second stage of axial coding, reexamination of the relationships between the 14 related concepts, 15 sub-categories (e.g., restructuring perception toward Japanese people) was constructed. For the final stage of selective coding, the relationships between/among sub-categories were further refined and 15 sub-categories were integrated to three categories (i.e., language-related, people-related, and society-related awareness, respectively) that followed a core-category (i.e., contact between formal classroom learning and informal host environment). In the process of three-step coding, the present researcher attempted to distance himself from not only his presumptions from the first quantitative data analysis above but also literature-based assumptions so as to develop theories grounded in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). After this second qualitative data analysis had been completed, this researcher extensively reviewed the literature in the light of new findings emerging from the empirical data and created broad research questions to be addressed.

Research Questions

1) How do female Chinese university exchange students perceive the process of linguistic learning in a study abroad context in Japan?
2) How do female Chinese university exchange students perceive the process of cultural learning in a study abroad context in Japan?
3) What is the relationship between linguistic and cultural learning processes that female Chinese university exchange students perceive in a study abroad context in Japan?
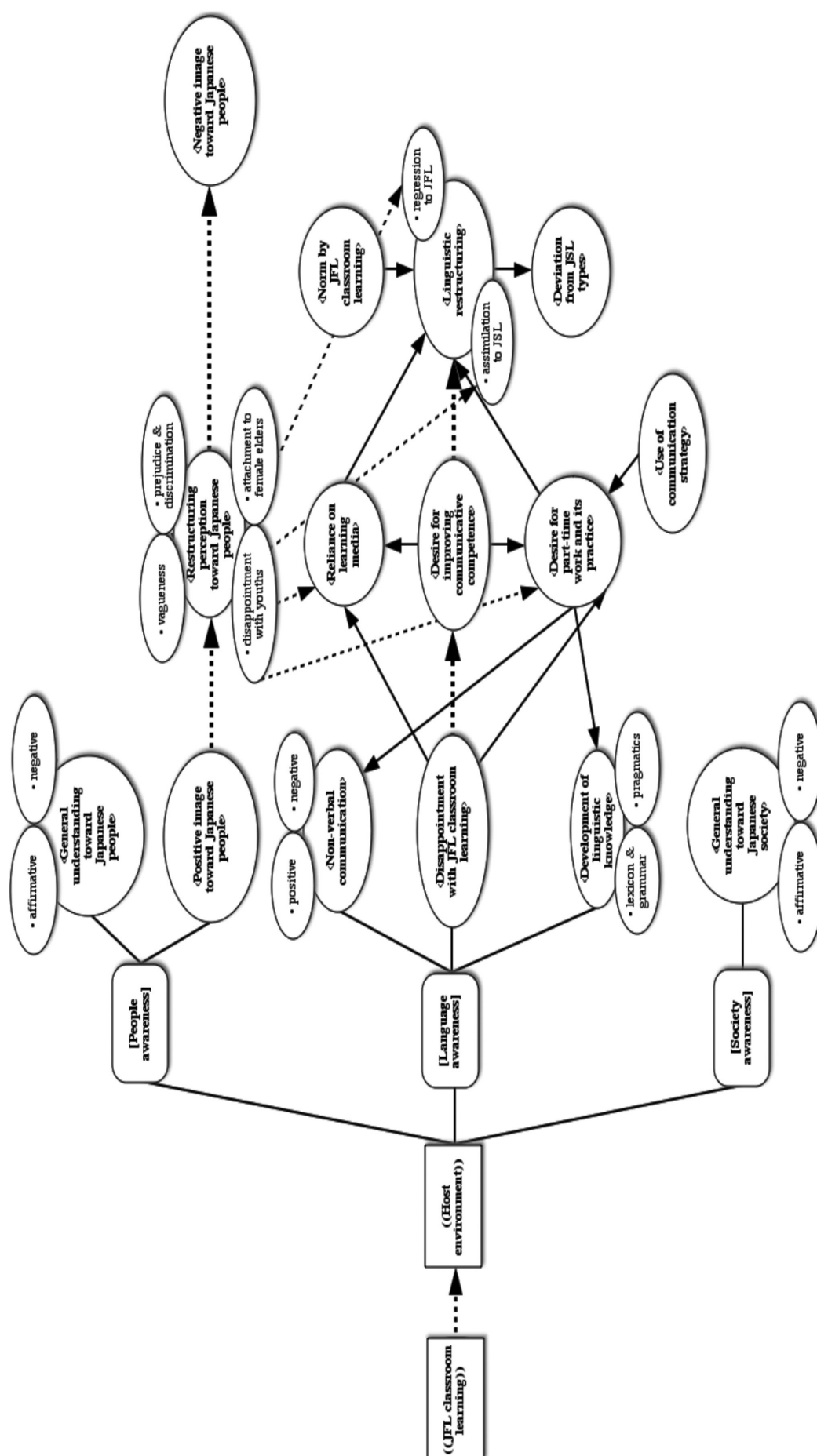
Findings

Through an examination of rich diary excerpts with follow-up interviews using a grounded theory approach, this researcher identified "contact" between the formal home classroom learning and the informal host environment as a core-category and created three categories under it that included language, people, and society awareness, consisting of 15 sub-categories, some of which contain 14 smaller-level concepts (see Figure 1). The diagram of these categories and concepts also shows the relationships among core-category, categories, sub-categories and concepts. The thick dotted arrows (e.g., from a sub-category of "disappointment with JFL classroom learning" to a sub-category of "desire for improving communicative competence") from left to right indicate direction of change; thin solid arrows (e.g., from a sub-category of "disappointment with JFL classroom learning" to a sub-category of "reliance on learning media") indicate direction of influence within each category, while thin dotted arrows (e.g., from a concept of "disappointment with youths" to a sub-category of "desire for part-time work and its practice") direction of influence across categories; and thin solid lines (e.g., a category of "language awareness" includes sub-categories of "non-verbal communication," "disappointment with JFL classroom learning" and "development of linguistic knowledge") indicate links between points. Although concepts are linked with each sub-category, the relationships are shown not by lines but by overlapping. The following sections provide a brief description and explanation of the diagram of categories and concepts shown in Figure 1.

Language-related Awareness

In the process of contact between the formal JFL classroom instruction and learning in China and the informal host environment in Japan (core-category), the participants became aware of language-related features (category) with those related to people and society awareness. In particular, the participants were involved in the linguistically-restructuring process over time (sub-category). Namely, they were in a conflict of perceptions between regression to JFL (concept) and assimilation to JSL (concept). This linguistic conflict resulted from their perceptions of the gap between norms developed by JFL classroom instruction/learning in their home country (sub-category) and actual language use by hosts. Moreover, the participants were not necessarily capable of recognizing actual linguistic forms used by the hosts according to native norms (e.g., confusing vogue speech with local dialects). This is an example of deviation from JSL types (sub-category).

In the earlier stages of the linguistically-restructuring process, participants were disappointed with their command of JFL classroom learning (sub-category) and had a desire to improve their L2 competence enough to communicate with the hosts (sub-category). This desire also led to a reliance on learning media such as television (sub-category) and engagement in part-time work off-campus (sub-category). In the workplace, they were more alert to the use of communication strategies (sub-category). In the process of contact with the informal host environment, participants were also developing linguistic knowledge (sub-category) related to lexicon and grammar (concept), and pragmatics (concept). Moreover, they were keen to engage in non-verbal communication (sub-category) where they positively adapted to the hosts' behaviors so as not to threaten native "negative face" (concept, see Brown & Levinson, 1978: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – to freedom of action and freedom from imposition) and they negatively adapted to the hosts' behaviors so as not to lose their own "positive face" (concept, see Brown & Levinson, 1978: the positive consistent self-image or personality, including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of, claimed by interactants). The former examples show that participants perceived their own behaviors accommodating to ways of Japanese natives where they would hand over things like gifts with both hands in formal settings rather than handing with one hand which was deviated from norms of Japanese politeness. Moreover, participants would be accommodated to knock on a door two times when entering the room rather than knocking three times because this

‹Negative image toward Japanese people›

• regression to JFL

‹Norm by JFL classroom learning›

‹Linguistic restructuring›

• assimilation to JSL

‹Deviation from JSL types›

• prejudice & discrimination

• attachment to female elders

‹Restructuring perception toward Japanese people›

• vagueness

‹Use of communication strategy›

‹Reliance on learning media›

‹Desire for improving communicative competence›

‹Desire for part-time work and its practice›

• disappointment with youths

• negative

‹General understanding toward Japanese people›

• affirmative

‹Positive image toward Japanese people›

• negative

‹Non-verbal communication›

• positive

‹Disappointment with JFL classroom learning›

• pragmatics

‹Development of linguistic knowledge›

• lexicon & grammar

• negative

‹General understanding toward Japanese society›

• affirmative

[People awareness]

[Language awareness]

[Society awareness]

((Host environment))

((JFL classroom learning))

Figure 1 *Diagram of categories and concepts.*

attracts immediate attention for Japanese natives so that they would answer the door in a panic. The latter examples show that participants demonstrated some level of hesitation and came to have less physical contact with female friends walking hand-in-hand when going out or to eat less food in public on trains or buses, although these behaviors were deviated from native norms of Chinese culture.

People-related Awareness

In the process of contact between the formal JFL classroom instruction and learning in China and the informal host environment in Japan (core-category), participants became aware of people-related features (category) with those related to language and society awareness. In particular, they were involved in the process of restructuring their perceptions towards the hosts over time (sub-category). In the earlier stages, participants had positive images of their hosts, such as being polite and kind in general (sub-category). In the latter stages, however, they were developing negative images towards the hosts (sub-category). This is because of the hosts' vagueness (concept), and prejudice or discrimination (concept). In the people-related restructuring process, moreover, participants were disappointed with young women's behavior (concept) while they had a deep attachment to female elders (concept). In the process of contact with the informal host environment, participants were also developing a general understanding about their hosts (sub-category), such as in regard to Japanese parents' disciplining of children as being affirmative (concept) and office workers' drinking after work as being negative (concept). Unlike their hosts' vagueness, prejudice or discrimination, and youths' behaviors, these examples were not relevant to the participants' face-threatening issues.

Society-related Awareness

In the process of contact between the formal JFL classroom instruction and learning in China and the informal host environment in Japan (core-category), the participants became aware of society-related features (category) with those related to language and people awareness. In the process, the participants were developing a general understanding about the host society over time (sub-category), such as where they evaluated social welfare as being affirmative (concept) and different traffic rules from China as being negative (concept). These examples were not directly connected with issues of language and people of which the participants were aware in Japan.

Discussion

Through the unravelling of the complex relationships as shown in the diagram of categories and concepts (Figure 1) illustrated above, this study identified that there were tensions in contact between the formal home classroom learning and the informal host environment in which participants had been/were involved. To put it differently, the impact of normative knowledge and skills that they had developed in the formal JFL classroom with an emphasis on grammar- or textbook-based instruction in their home university was influential on the process of negotiating with linguistic and cultural learning in the host L2 environment.

In the Process of Linguistic Learning

Contrary to having a honeymoon experience at the initial arrival stage – which is a common finding of intercultural adjustment studies (Oberg, 1960) – soon after the participants arrived in Japan, they were very surprised and embarrassed with the great discrepancy between the formally instructed JFL in their home university, which placed less focus on the development of communicative competence so

as to interact with their hosts, and the informal JSL of the host environment. The following are excerpts from the participants' diaries:

> I had studied Japanese for over one year before I came to Japan. Through interaction with Japanese natives here, however, I came to realize a big gap between the Japanese language I had learned and the language that they actually use. (P4: D6)

> The most impressive thing I experienced so far during my stay in Japan is the difference between written and spoken Japanese. If you spoke like the conversations in textbooks, it would really sound odd. (P2: D30)

Moreover, participants perceived that regular lectures and other JSL classes they were involved in at the host university did not help them to acquire native-like oral proficiency. Together with a loss of interest in academic classroom learning on campus in the host environment (cf. Yerken & Nguyen Luu, 2022), participants came to develop negative attitudes towards the host young female university students in terms of language use and academic, educational, and sociocultural behaviors which deviated from their normative perceptions of traditional, or stereotypical, Japanese women.

> I found that attitudes of Japanese university students in class were very different from those of Chinese university students. Japanese students usually have seats at the back and don't feel ashamed even when they are absent or late for school. (P4: D8)

> For as long as I have lived in Japan, I came to have more respect for its economic and cultural achievements. In contrast, however, I came to dislike young people in particular. They are not the "diligent Japanese" of which I had an image before coming to Japan. They have been brought up free from all care in an affluent society and inevitably became spiritless and egocentric in that they have little interest in other things. (P1: D18)

Interestingly, these factors resulted in the construction of other educational domains for informal JSL learning (cf. Kashiwa, 2022) which relied on such media as watching television as a more useful L2 learning strategy, and engagement in part-time work in the service industry off-campus as extending social networks with their hosts whose gender and age in the homogeneous academic community were different from theirs.

At this stage, while participants wished to acquire native-like L2 proficiency, they were in conflict with conceptualizing informal JSL, which deviated considerably from formally instructed JFL, in interacting with hosts on- and off-campus.

> At the moment, it is really difficult to properly master even improper [informal] Japanese, although apart from language teachers, ordinary people don't speak proper [standard] Japanese. (P3: D13)

Particularly, in the contexts of local dialects, colloquial or vogue expressions, and gender-related speech, participants were negotiating with the complex nature of informal JSL, monitored by their normative knowledge and skills developed in a formal JFL classroom where they favored use of proper, correct, standard Japanese in order not to threaten their own and hosts' faces.

> I'm not happy with the widespread use of loanwords in youth's speech, because traditional Japanese is disappearing on the one hand, and it is more difficult for foreigners to learn changing Japanese on the other hand. (P4: D10)

> Local dialects and vogue speech might not be correct Japanese in that they don't follow correct grammar. If you wish to speak native-like Japanese, however, you have to master the local dialects and vogue speech. (P2: D12)

> The other day, I had an opportunity to talk with an overseas student, and she said that Japanese natives pointed out her unconscious use of male speech forms . . . . I haven't have such experiences, but I can't say for sure that I have never used male forms before. The Japanese language has traditionally been characterized by a distinctively male or female speech style. So, if you mixed up gender-exclusive speech, your interlocutor would think it was odd. (P2: D20)

> I think even foreigners have to learn the distinctive usage of female and male speech style, because the unconscious and inappropriate use of gender-exclusive speech, as women speak like men, might give offence to interlocutors. For me, however, I haven't yet made a differentiation. Similarly, looking at female native students around me, I feel they are rough in their speech, but I'm not sure if they use specific masculine forms. (P2: FiD20)

To make matters worse, participants' normative perceptions to use correct Japanese resulted in restraining their desire to establish sufficient communication with hosts, particularly when interacting with those of a higher social status.

On the other hand, participants' positive attitudes towards the use of normative Japanese brought about tensions on constructing their dual identities of gender and age (cf. Ting-Toomey, 2005). Firstly, participants had their desire to assimilate to vogue speech used by the hosts of a younger generation. Secondly, participants favored to construct feminine identity with the traditionally distinctive use of a female speech style, even with exposure to the mixed use of gendered speech style by young women in the host environment.

In the Process of Cultural Learning

Participants initially had positive attitudes towards their hosts and then came to develop negative perceptions towards them during study abroad. Specifically, soon after their arrival in Japan, participants perceived positive attributes as politeness and kindness in general towards their hosts. This was in contrast to perceptions of language shock that participants had at the initial stage of the linguistically-restructuring process, as mentioned earlier.

> I got the impressions that Japanese were very polite, kind and punctual. (P1: D1)

> Through interaction with teachers and students around me, I thought Japanese natives were polite. I mean, they greeted me even in the first encounter on campus. (P1: FiD1)

> I was quite impressed that most Japanese people with whom I became familiar were kind and took good care of us. I sensed that I would not feel lonely, although it was the first time to be away from my home and to live alone in a foreign country. (P3: D1)

During this honeymoon stage, due to the limited amount of interaction with their hosts, participants conceptualized temporal experiences as being polite and kind to describe the overall characteristics of the hosts. The more widely and deeply they interacted with their hosts, however, participants came to develop negative perceptions regarding them. This is a departure from common findings of intercultural

adjustment processes (Oberg, 1960) that described the final stage as being adaptation or assimilation to the host environment.

In this respect, firstly participants psychologically maintained a sense of distance from their hosts, in that their hosts did not achieve what participants expected, based on native norms of close relationships that they had conceptualized. This is an example of the cultural distance effect (Masgoret & Ward, 2006).

> Japanese should express their feelings in a more direct manner. They usually control something unhappy, so I have been a bit doubtful of Japanese tenderness lately. Wouldn't it be kinder to us if they expressed their feelings directly? (P1: D5)

> Japanese are polite, indeed, but it seems to be difficult to have close relationships with them even as friends. If they were Chinese, I would be able to talk frankly about how I feel . . . . This wouldn't go better even if I could speak Japanese more fluently. (P1: D17)

Secondly, the hosts' negative behavior in terms of vagueness, and prejudice or discrimination led to an increase in the participants' psychological distance from their hosts. Namely, the hosts' vague behavior confused the participants when interacting with them, although the hosts intended to save participants' negative face as well as their own positive one (Brown & Levinson, 1978). For participants who respected direct expression as one of their native norms, however, the hosts' indirect manner resulted in a sense of discomfort and insincerity (cf. Sasaki & Ortlieb, 2017), whereby the participants were unable to understand what they intended to express. This is also an example of the cultural distance effect.

> We once discussed the differences between China and Japan regarding culture-related issues with native students in the classroom. Given the subject of love in the beginning, however, the natives seemed to be so shy, looking at each other, and were keeping silent for a while. A few minutes later, one of the Chinese overseas students broached the topic, and then we frankly expressed our opinions. Actually, we sometimes wrangled with each other when our interlocutors expressed a different point of view. In contrast, the native students, in spite of having much more numbers than the overseas students, didn't indicate their intentions much and just listened to others during the class . . . . Anyway, while it is important for Chinese to express their opinion in a clear and direct manner, it could be possible for Japanese to defer to the majority with the use of ambiguous expressions such as *soo kamoshirenai* (i.e., could be) and *soo da ne* (i.e., should be) even when they had a different point in mind. (P4: D12)

> I have found that direct expressions, apart from those in close relationships such as friends, would not be polite. When I was chatting with a Japanese customer in my workplace, he asked me if I had cooked in China before the chef taught me here. I replied, "no, I didn't cook much, but don't worry about it. Whether or not I can cook has nothing to do with my future job as well as this part-time job, right?" Later on, he said to me, "you are a real Chinese, too. If you were Japanese, you would get out of the situation by giving vague answers such as "well…" and "sorry, but…." (P2: D17)

> What I have found includes not only the ambiguity of the Japanese language but also the vagueness of Japanese people. For example, even if they were asked what they want for a souvenir from China, they would not mention it in a direct manner. (P1: FiD14)

The hosts' prejudice or discrimination (cf. Kinginger, 2009), which often occurred in the participants' workplaces, acted to accelerate their negative perceptions towards their hosts. These unpleasant incidents indicate that unlike the claims of other studies (Kim, 2005), high degrees of extrinsic ethnic markers that participants share with the hosts do not necessarily lead to high levels of their tolerance and receptivity in the host environment (cf. Maruyama, 1998).

> When I was talking with customers in my workplace yesterday, they didn't realize at first that I was from China, but knew by the chef's words later that I was Chinese. They seemed to be quite surprised and one guy said, "what? You don't look like [a Chinese] at all, the same as a Japanese" . . . . He also said, "Japan is good, isn't it? You don't want to go home, do you? China is poor, isn't it?" . . . . I was quite disappointed. (P4: D15)

> When China was poor, it might be certain that people used to look differently from the Japanese people. These days, however, China has been developing astonishingly, and so they wouldn't be able to identify from our appearance if we are Chinese or not. The expression "you don't look like at all" means, therefore, that he still has an image of poor Chinese, particularly in dress and so on. (P4: FiD15)

Finally, in contrast to developing the participants' negative perceptions towards the host young female university students with which they regularly interacted in terms of such academic, educational, sociocultural behaviors and language use, they constructed positive attitudes towards elderly women as those of traditional Japanese in the host environment.

> When we were lost in town, we asked a middle-aged woman how to get somewhere, but we had difficulties in understanding her explanations. Surprisingly, she took us to the place. (P1: D2)

> When I was lost on the way to the airport, I tried to ask an elderly woman the way. As my senior of Chinese had pointed out before, she kindly showed it to me. (P3: D11)

> I and other Chinese exchange students were invited to our teacher's home in New Year holidays. Then, I was so impressed with his wife. She, who looked to be in her fifties, greeted us so politely and used honorifics even when addressing her husband. It was the same as what had appeared in textbooks. I thought she was a typical Japanese woman. (P3: D32)

This normative perception reflected participants' traditional expectations borne from formal textbook-based JFL instruction and learning in their home university. More importantly, however, participants evaluated Japanese women positively or negatively, not by giving credence to social status as a determining factor for gender-related issues in Western contexts (Siegal, 1994), but by their actual behaviors.

> Many Chinese people believe that Japanese women are socially inferior and subordinate to men in that wives do housework and just wait for their husbands' return from work. Through interaction with women since I came to Japan, however, I realized it was a stereotypical view. In fact, they play active roles in modern society, such as in volunteer activities, exhibitions that display their works and group tours, which are organized only by/for women. (P1: D34)

> My JSL teacher said that in his generation [in his fifties], Japanese women quit their jobs and became full-time housewives after they got married. His wife is also the case of one who gets money from him every month to handle the household and thus doesn't have to work outside the house. This is different from China where most of women continue to work after marriage and where their husbands also help with housework. With the growth of social awareness in Japan, however, there seem to be increasing numbers of women who wish to obtain satisfactory results for work and consequently who are financially independent. (P2: D8)

That is, regardless of unequal social regard from Japanese men of the older generation, from a traditional sense, participants maintained positive attitudes towards elderly women. Despite the improving social standing of Japanese women of the younger generation that participants perceived in the host environment, they developed negative attitudes towards young women due to negatively-viewed behaviors which deviated considerably from their normative perceptions.

Conclusion

This study highlighted both cross-linguistic and cross-cultural experiences of four female Chinese university exchange students in a Japanese study abroad context over one academic year. The findings indicated that, as a result of the impact of rich formal JFL classroom instruction and learning in participants' home country, there were dynamic tensions between their attitudes towards normative or authentic language use and their perceptions of traditional or exploratory identity in the host environment that both negotiated with gender and age.

Firstly, none of the sojourners' experiences during their study abroad represented the typical U-curve (Lysgaard, 1955; see also Oberg, 1960). At the linguistic level, the sojourners experienced "nightmare," or language shock at the initial arrival stage, while at the cultural level they came to develop negative attitudes towards their hosts over time. These findings indicate that processes of linguistic and cultural learning that sojourners recognized in the host environment are interwoven with one another, while the two do not necessarily work in the same direction to adjustment.

Secondly, age and gender had significant effects on the perceptions of the sojourners in the processes of both linguistic and cultural learning. For instance, sojourners positively evaluated such youth-specific speech style as vogue speech in spite of having negative perceptions towards sociocultural behaviors of local youth, particularly of the host female university students. On the other hand, sojourners negatively evaluated the masculine speech style employed by young women, while with deep attachments to elderly women, they respected traditionally feminine speech style. These findings indicate that the sojourners were constructing dual identities that negotiate with age and gender (cf. Ting-Toomey, 2005), that is, an exploratory identity where the sojourners wished to behave like other youth at the linguistic level and a traditional identity where they wished to be polite like elderly women at both the linguistic and cultural levels.

The fundamental principle of a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is to develop a theory grounded in data, namely, where researchers are encouraged not to have any one theoretical perspective at the initial stage of the research, and to relate the findings emerging from data with existing theories in the literature at the final stage. In practice, it is difficult at this final stage to relate all the findings in this study to existing theories of linguistic and cultural learning literature in study abroad contexts so as to conceptualize the dynamics of the life experiences of the four female Chinese sojourners during their study abroad. However, the findings of this year-long study have clearly highlighted that none of the sojourners' experiences in a study abroad context repre-

sented the models of conceptualizing adaptive changes (Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg 1960), particularly in that as a result of the impact of formal JFL classroom instruction and learning in sojourners' home country, there were growing tensions between their attitudes towards normative or authentic language use and their perceptions of traditional or exploratory identity in the host environment that both negotiated with gender and age. Ting-Toomey (2005) claimed in identity negotiation work that "individuals in an intercultural situation attempt to assert, define, modify, challenge, and/ or support their own and others' desired self-images" (p. 217). Here, identity change or transformation would be inevitable in a cross-culturally adaptive journey, where sojourners attempted to reflect or shape views of themselves through interaction with hosts. This study would thus present new insights to be considered for JFL education in China with a central focus placed on grammar- or textbook-based instruction.

Suggestions for Future Research

Regarding the methodological strategies applied, this study utilized a grounded theory approach as essential in analyzing diary entries with follow-up interviews. As illustrated earlier in the procedures of data analysis, the researcher first attempted to illuminate common patterns with excerpts across the four participants by vertically, or quantitatively analyzing issues which appeared each in their diary entries with follow-up interviews, with reference to suggestions by Allwright and Bailey (1991). These are: frequency of mention, the number of times a given topic is identified in the diary entries; distribution of mention, the number of different people who mention a given topic; saliency, the strength of the expression with which a topic is recorded. These authors further claimed that saliency can be quantified if different verbal expressions can be given numbered ratings as to their strength. However, this researcher believed that this type of analysis, with its focus on quantifiable measures, would isolate variables constructing the sojourners' experiences and would not be effective to uncover the relationships among variables for better understanding the dynamics of their perceptions in the processes of the linguistic and cultural learning during study abroad. In regard to this, Byram and Feng (2006) argued:

> What is discussed in methods textbooks is helpful but needs to be adapted to the vagaries of actual research: drop-out from samples, the change of direction of the researcher's thinking, discovery of new methods half way through, the choices to be made when analysis takes place. (p. 6)

Therefore, as the next step in analyzing participants' dairies with follow-up interviews in further depth, this researcher, using a grounded theory approach, decided to examine excerpts horizontally, or qualitatively. Although this analytic approach demanded an open mind and theoretical sensitivity on the part of the researcher, as well as the time, energy and patience for data analysis, it was powerful in helping to produce a holistic account of Chinese sojourners' learning experiences in a Japanese study abroad context.

With regards to implications for future research, it is necessary that to substantiate and elaborate the findings of this study, further studies should be conducted in a similar fashion but different study abroad contexts, because individual and situated variables interact in different ways. For example, if the participants in this study were not of Chinese background, if the participants were at coeducational university settings, or if the participants were not exchange university students but full-time overseas university students (who initiated informal JSL learning on and off Japanese language schools in Japan prior to their university entrance, without normative knowledge and skills developed in formal classroom instruction and learning in the home country), the findings might

have varied dramatically from those presented in this study. A series of such studies in other study abroad contexts would provide further insights into the relationships of the linguistic and cultural processes that sojourners perceive.

Note

This paper is part of a series of this author's previous research (Asada, 2014), with more emphasis in the current paper being put on methodological issues about diary studies, including follow-up interviews, and also with analytical procedures using a grounded theory approach.

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