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以敘事研究初探語言學習者自主動能與其學習環境之互動

**A Narrative Inquiry on the Interplay between Language Learner Agency and  
Learning Contexts**

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LEARNER AGENCY AND LEARNING CONTEXTS

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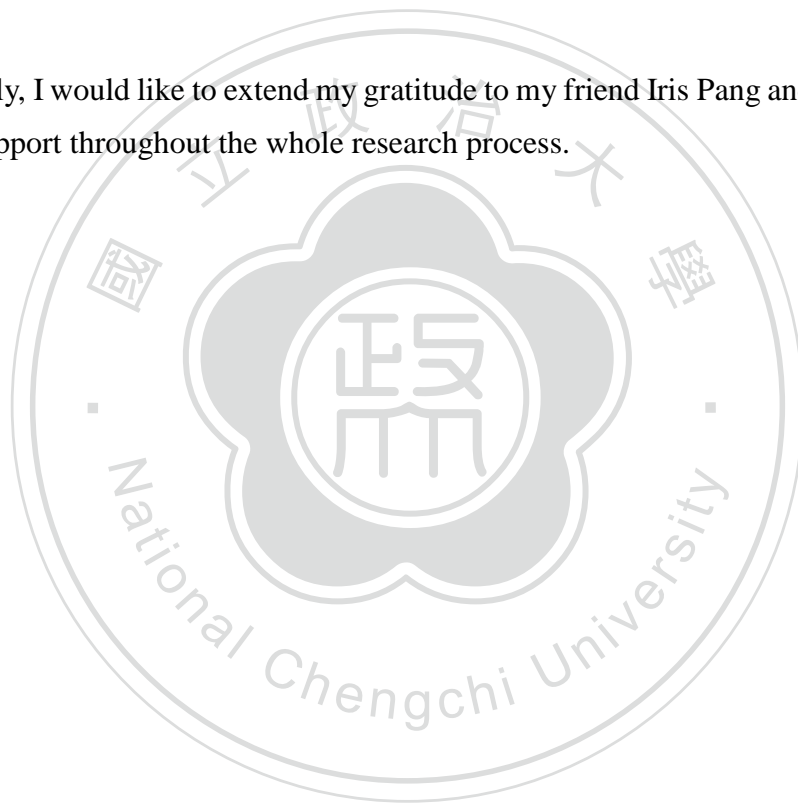
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## 摘要

本文以敘事研究的方式，透過深入訪談，探討一位台灣語言學習者的自主動能 (learner agency) 與其學習環境之互動。經由敘事訪談 (narrative interview)、開放式訪談、半結構訪談以及分析受訪者社群網站發表之文章，本論文意圖呈現台灣語言學習者在不同學習環境中如何表現自主動能。

本研究以受訪者 Erin 出國留學為分界，共三個階段：第一階段為受訪者出國前 (2014/08/25)，以敘事訪談 (narrative interview) 的方式，Erin 完整呈現自我對英語的認知與語言學習歷程之掙扎。第二階段為 Erin 出國以後，藉由開放式與半結構訪談，描繪出 Erin 在國外求學的經驗，並更深刻探討過去的語言學習歷程。第三階段為 Erin 回國後(2015/09/17)，再次以敘事訪談的方式，Erin 反思英國求學的經驗以及英語在其人生中扮演的角色。

本研究以 van Lier 所提之自主動能的三個特色為分析框架，並推衍出兩項申明：其一，台灣英語學習者在正式的語言學習環境中面臨許多挑戰，但學習者仍有表現自主動能的空間，表現方式包括逃避或拒絕學習；其二，學習者若能沈浸於語言習得的環境 (foreign language acquisition environments)，極有可能脫離正式語言學習環境的框架而成為一個不同於以往的自己。本研究檢視學習者在不同的學習環境中如何展現自主動能，筆者期望研究結果可提供語言教師看待語言學習者一個新視角。

**關鍵字：**學習者自主動能、學習環境、以英語為外語之學習者、英語學習歷程

## Abstract

Drawing on the concept of learner agency, a narrative inquiry was conducted in order to achieve an in-depth, qualitative understanding of the interplay between a Taiwanese learner's exert of agency and various contexts. The study was developed in three phases, and multiple number of interviews were the main instrument for data collection. The first interview was conducted in August, 2014, before the participant, Erin, headed for England to pursue a Master's degree. The following interviews documented her life experiences abroad and further explored her past language learning history. The final interview was conducted in September, 2015 after she came back to Taiwan, in which she reflected on her overall study abroad experiences and the role of English in her life. The findings delineated Erin's English learning story and her agency domestically and internationally. van Lier's proposal of core features of learner agency was used as the analytic framework to discuss Erin's story, and later two assertions were derived from the discussion: (1) Being an EFL learner in the Taiwanese formal educational context may involve many challenges, but the learner still has room to exercise his or her agency—even though this could mean avoiding or rejecting learning, and (2) Fully engaged in a foreign language environment, the learner is likely to break away from the limitations of formal English learning system. The study delineates a close examination on how the language learner interacted with various contexts and demonstrates several considerations TESOL practitioners can take. Based on the findings and the discussion, pedagogical implications as well as suggestions for future research are also provided at the end of the thesis.

*Keywords:* learner agency, learning contexts, EFL learner, English learning history



## Preface

I would like to use “playing a video game” as a metaphor to conceptualize English learning experiences that Taiwanese ELF learners might have. Imagine the game of Super Mario. In the game, Mario, the player, needs to go through obstacles, destroy enemies, and collect as many coins as he can in order to clear the stage, just as the language learner picking up as many new vocabulary words or grammar rules as possible to conquer various tests. In one sense, it is fun and interesting, for you keep challenging yourself to level up and win yourself a sense of achievement; however, it might annoy you when being trapped in the same level for too long.

English learning is the game all Taiwanese students need to play. Some fail to level up but still try their best to step forward; others might find the game too boring and immediately quit the game without a second thought. Interestingly, under different circumstances and with the interaction of various contexts, people they encounter, or different cultural experiences, some might have another chance to pick up the language they once discarded; in other words, people’s relationship and sense-making of the language is fluid and dynamic, depending on their interaction with the social contexts.

Erin, the protagonist in the present research, has have an awkward relationship with English for a long period of time. She hated English as a young adult, and she refused to learn the language at that time since she could not see the value in it. Growing older and having different encountering, she started to conceptualize the language differently, and her English competence improved at the same time. She is never a hard-working type, as she stated herself; however, while dealing with various

challenges under different circumstances, Erin gradually changed her sense of English.

I share some similar experiences with Erin. English was once a language I wanted to be friend with but it seemed far beyond my league. The vocabulary on the textbooks were just words. They were dead to me. However, when I started to watch American TV series, the language was not just a language anymore; it became alive. While watching the show, I realized how those words, phrases, or even sentences were used in contexts. This experience opened up a door for me, and I also started to make sense of the language in a totally different way.

From my own experiences and Erin's, I begin to think what English means to us as EFL learners. How do EFL learners exercise their agency to deal with various challenges and scenarios? Particularly with learners like Erin, who once hated English so much but in the end, she made peace with the language and went study abroad with English as the medium language. How did this kind of change happen? What was the story behind? To further explore how Erin interacts with different sociocultural contexts, I started an inquiry and walk a journey with her.

## Chapter 1 Introduction

English has been widely acknowledged as the international language for global communication. In response to globalization and in order to promote competitive edge, English has been introduced as a compulsory subject for students to learn since first grade in elementary school in Taiwan. Even though all students receive official English language education at a young age, a great discrepancy exists in learners' English proficiency levels, and such a discrepancy is embodied as the bipolar distribution shown in junior high graduates' English scores on the Basic Competence Test<sup>1</sup>, the nationwide senior high school entrance exam (Chang, 2011).

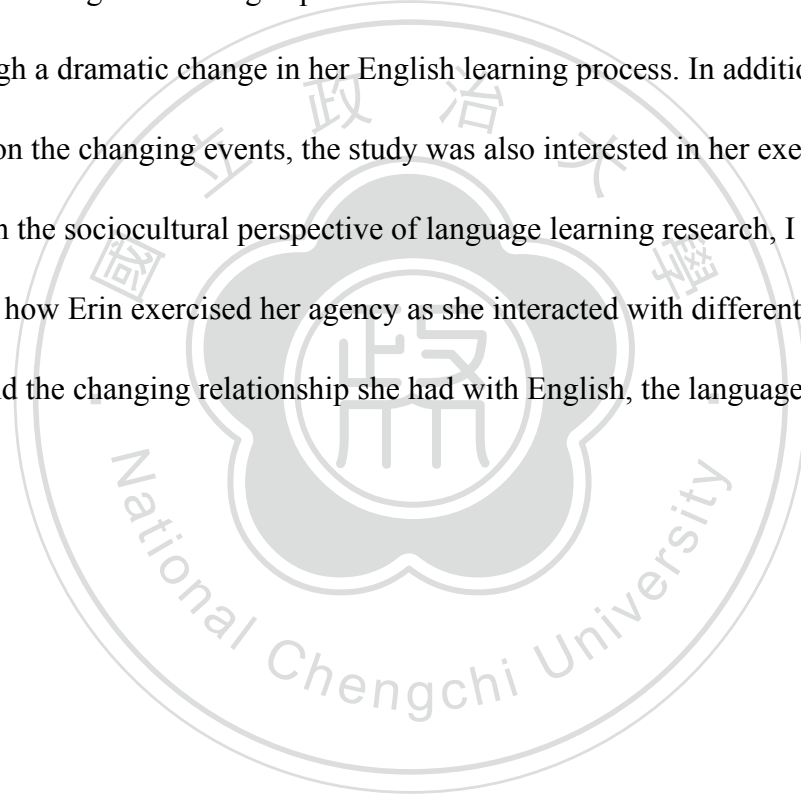
Chang (2011) pointed out that the reasons for the bipolar distribution of students' test scores and the great discrepancy of students' English proficiency could be discussed from several perspectives: Externally, there are such reasons as the differing availability of learning resources, teacher professionalism, and learners' family backgrounds, while internally, learners also differ in terms of interests, motivation, or learner autonomy. In addition, recent investigation on Basic Competence Test shows declining scores indicating that more and more junior high school students were giving up on learning English. There is a need to understand how learner agency shifts based on the context that the learner finds themselves. Currently, however, research in this area is still not sufficient. For example, Taiwanese learner's shifting agency in the process of English learning has not been sufficiently documented.

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<sup>1</sup> The Basic Competence Test is a nationwide high school entrance exam, in which five main subjects are included: Chinese, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and English. The Test is a standardized test that students' performance is calculated with scaled scoring. The first Basic Competence Test was held in 2000, and in 2014 the Test was replaced with The Comprehensive Assessment Program.

Language learner agency as defined by van Lier (2010) is “movement, a change of state or direction, or even a lack of movement where movement is expected” (p.4)

It is known that English learning or any kind of foreign language learning often takes a long time and involves a wide variety of experiences. There will be ups and downs that the learner needs to deal with, and it is very likely that agency will play some critical roles in the process. By adopting narrative inquiry, this study aimed to investigate the English learning experiences of one Taiwanese EFL learner, Erin, who went through a dramatic change in her English learning process. In addition to her narratives on the changing events, the study was also interested in her exert of agency. Drawing on the sociocultural perspective of language learning research, I specifically focused on how Erin exercised her agency as she interacted with different learning contexts and the changing relationship she had with English, the language.



## Chapter 2 Literature Review

### Embarking the Exploration of the Reality and the Theory

As mentioned above, learners in Taiwan are exposed to English education when very little, and nowadays there are a variety of access for learners to learn English. To explore Erin's employment of agency while encountering different contexts, I shall first explain what I mean by context and sketch two main English learning contexts relevant to my participant's story, i.e., English learning domestically and internationally. The former includes school and private language institutes, whereas the latter refers to study abroad experiences. The last part of the review is the agency framework that I use to interpret the participant's story.

#### Context

Context itself is a difficult term to define. The present research considers the term context within ecological perspective (van Lier, 2004) that context stretches from more micro to more macro levels; the former refers to immediate family context while the latter indicates the sociocultural beliefs and attitudes (Mercer, 2016). With the understanding of the term, context shall not be seen as "a bounded, monolithic, static system" but a "dynamic, multifaceted system interconnected simultaneously with many other contextual systems" (Mercer, 2016, p. 14). The individual is thus situated in multilayered contexts, experiencing change and development across time.

To elaborate on the interaction between self and contexts, van Dijk (2004) contents that "contexts are not 'objective,' but subjective. (p. 5)," stressing that human agency is the key to how human beings "make meaning out of our

environments and behaviors and integrate these into our sense of self” (Mercer, 2016, p. 5). In other words, individuals not only form their understandings of the contexts but also make sense of the language and the meaning of language learning differently in the contexts.

In the following, I briefly discuss what it is like to learning English in Taiwanese context and what have found on study abroad.

What is it like to learn English in Taiwan?

In this section, I provide an overview of formal English education in Taiwan, the phenomenon of cram schooling, and research on study abroad.

### ***Formal English Education in Taiwanese Schools***

Su (2006) gave a detailed review of the development of English instruction in Taiwan. English instruction in Taiwan began early in 1949. At that time, students started to study English in secondary school, spending six hours per week during 20-week semesters in each school year. The school curricula mainly focused on students’ reading and writing skills, and the instruction centered on the grammar-translation method.

In 1993 and 1994, a new English curriculum for junior and senior high schools was launched by the Ministry of Education. The focus of English learning shifted from the training of fours skills to communicative competence, and communication-oriented teaching became the primary principle for teachers’ teaching practice as well as the guideline for textbook developers. With Grade 1-9 Curriculum

Guidelines (1999, MOE), the goal of teaching English stressed the importance of oral and written communication and cultural awareness. The specific objectives included (1) improving students' basic communicative competence in reading, writing, speaking and listening and being able to apply the four skills in real contexts, (2) cultivating students' interests in and approaches to English learning to develop learning autonomy, and (3) enhancing students' knowledge of local and foreign cultures and customs so that they can compare and respect cultural variations (1999, MOE, p.1). In sum, the new curriculum guidelines emphasize more on developing fluency through meaningful contexts instead of accuracy and rote memorization.

Although there have been tremendous changes in both curriculum guideline and textbook development, test-oriented attitude still prevails even up to this day and has great impact on teaching practice. Lectures and textbook reading are still the main classroom activities and a variety of in-class quizzes take place very frequently. Students' ultimate goal is the nationwide entrance examination, while one of the teachers' most important goals is to help students prepare for and pass the examination.

Not only did the curriculum guideline change, but the age of learners to start English education has been lowered. Since 1990, a growing number of parents and educators felt an urgent need to promote English learning at the elementary level, based on the belief that "the earlier children start to learn English, the higher the proficiency level they will achieve" (Su, 2006, p. 266). In 2001, students in the fifth grade were required to take English classes, and the age was further lowered to grade three in 2002.

English is still a required course even during college. Most college students need to study English for one to two years. In some universities, students will be asked to pass at least one authorized English test, such as TOEIC or GEPT<sup>2</sup>, as a requirement for graduation.

### ***Out of the School Context: The Phenomenon of Cram Schooling***

One of the most popular English learning contexts out of the school is cram schooling, which is prevalent in Asian countries, especially in Taiwan and Japan. Chung (2013) defined cram schools as “specialized fee-paying private schools that provide intensive courses of specific subjects to train tutees to enhance their academic ability or professional competence” (p. 585). Liu (2009) reported that the percentage of students who go to cram school from primary to senior high is respectively 70%, 72.9%, and 75.6%. Students go to cram schools with the aim to promote their academic performances, mostly on subjects like science, English, and math, and to prepare the entrance exams. Even for college students, nearly 30% of them will choose cram schools in preparation for the entrance exams to graduate school. Lin and Huang (2006) stated that “cram schooling is a popular social costume;” it is part of the social culture. This phenomenon will remain despite of the high enrollment ratio or the multi-phased entrance program.

According to Tsai and Kuo (2007), there are at least 5,000 cram schools that offer after-school classes in Taiwan. The researchers generally classified cram schools into three categories: *skill-oriented* cram schools providing classes of music, dancing

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<sup>2</sup> GEPT stands for The General English Proficiency Test, an English proficiency test developed and administrated by the language training and testing center (LTTC) in Taiwan.



or home economics that help students develop certain skills; *private language schools* which offer classes of different languages, and *academically-oriented* cram schools. For the third type of cram schools, the focus is mainly on improving students' academic performance on mathematics, science, and English, the major school subjects for entrance examinations of high school and college. Besides, the class size in this kind of cram schools is usually very large, consisting more than 100 students per class, and one of the instructional features in the schools is that various tests and tutorial problem exercises are frequently administered (Tsai & Kou, 2007).

This classification of cram schools is useful, but it simply sketches some of the main institutionalized accesses to English learning. There are actually also other options for English learning. For example, more and more parents choose to hire an English tutor for their children since they believe one-on-one tutoring sessions can be more effective to help with their children's learning difficulties. More and more small-scaled language institutes have also popped up to offer smaller-sized or one-on-one classes.

To conclude, there are diverse after-school private language institutes in Taiwan that attend to different students' needs or to meet parents' requirements/expectations. Since attending private language institutes is such a wide spread phenomenon in Taiwan, any investigations on Taiwanese English learning would have to include a discussion on this aspect of the learner's experience.

### ***Study Abroad for Further Education***

Study abroad (SA) was defined by Kinginger (2009) as “a temporary sojourn of pre-defined duration, undertaken for educational purposes (p. 11).” Research on studying abroad (SA) has many facets, including the impact on language skill improvements (Cubillos et. al., 2008; Kang, 2014), changes in degree of foreign accent (Munoz & Llanes, 2014), identity issue identity issue (Kinginger, 2004) or the change of learner beliefs (Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Kaypak & Ortactepe, 2014; Kim & Yang, 2010; Yang & Kim, 2011). This research mostly focuses on the outcomes of SA, or the effects SA have on the language learner. Wang (2010) argues that documenting and interpreting what happens before, during, and after studying abroad can be valuable for SA research.

In Taiwan, according to the statistics provided by the Minister of Education, from 2013-2017, approximately 0.2 % people choose to study abroad, and the United States of America is the first priority; however, in the recent 5 years, the number of people who go to Japan and Australia increases most. The statistics implies that although America is still Taiwanese students’ top choice, more and more people choose other Asian countries such as Japan, or Australia for further education.

Several studies have documented Taiwanese students’ SA experiences, and the research topics include the shift of learner identity (Huang, 2017), communicative experiences (Mullaney, 2017), the interface between naming and identity (Chen, 2012), and anxiety in English learning (Wang, 2009). The studies mainly discuss the issue of learner identity or learners’ willingness to communicate. In the present research, similar issues were addressed as well, but the researcher was particularly

interested in how the participant changed while encountering different scenarios in the SA context within the frame of sociocultural theory, especially through the lens of agency.

### **To View English Learning Process through the Lens of Agency**

The concept of agency has been discussed in many disciplines, and the most widely cited definition of agency comes from Ahearn (2001), who referred to agency as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (p. 112). Agency, as Dufva and Aro (2015) noted, “has been theorized and studied particularly within the Neo-Vygotskian, or sociocultural, point of view” (p. 37). Sociocultural theory (SCT) is rooted in the works of L. S. Vygotsky, and the perspective argues that all human psychological processes are considered social in nature; that is, human development, or learning, is not strictly cognitivist, or happening “*in the head*” (p. 2), but emerges through social experience (Meskill, 2013). Under this framework, learners are no longer seen as passive recipients of specific knowledge; rather, learners are actually “active agents” (Meskill, 2013, p. 4), and the practice of learning is a “*in the world*” (p. 2) phenomena in which the larger historical and contextual elements are all associated with the learning activity and need to be taken into consideration. How learners exercise their agency to cope with different challenges in the learning contexts therefore become crucial issues to explore.

van Lier (2010) defined agency as “movement, a change of state or direction, or even a lack of movement where movement is expected” (p. 4). That is, if a person wants to do something, he or she will take some real actions. However, it does not

mean that each person will always perform the action when he or she is expected to do so; in fact, refusing to do something is also a kind of agentive action. This concept indicates the inseparability of learning and agency. As van Lier (2010) further elaborated, “the employment of agency depends on a learning-conducive environment that allows and instigates a diversity of manifestations of agency at different levels” (p. 5).

To gain a clearer picture of when and where agency emerges, van Lier (2008) drew on six extracts of classroom learning situations and suggested that “agency is situated in a particular context and that it is something that learners do, rather than something that learners possess;” to put it differently, agency is presented as learners’ *behavior* in context rather than *property* (p 163). van Lier thus proposed three core features of learner agency: “(1) Agency involves initiative or self-regulation by the learner; (2) Agency is interdependent, that is, it mediates and is mediated by the sociocultural context; (3) Agency includes an awareness of the responsibility for one’s own actions vis-à-vis the environment, including affected others” (p.172).

Several studies have investigated foreign language learner agency in different educational contexts (Xiao, 2014; Coffey, 2013; Chang, 2011; Gao, 2010; Stanfield, 2015). For example, focusing on agentive experiences with distance education, Xiao (2014) examined the role agency plays in the learning process of a distant language learner in China. Based on an in-depth analysis on interview data, the findings showed that learner agency is important in constructing one’s new identity, enhancing self-efficacy, maintaining motivation, and exercising metacognitive thinking and actions. On the other hand, in terms of agency in study abroad contexts, Chang (2011)

studied how agency and imagined community influence nonnative English-speaking (NNES) doctoral students' selection of learning investments when studying abroad. Four major aspects were presented in the findings, including funding versus academic progress, coping with diminished social network, overcoming language barriers, and strengthening disciplinary-specific competence. The results showed that choices of where and how they made investments were guided by individual learner agency and personal academic aspirations.

As to how agency plays a role in multiple contexts, Gao's study is particularly inspiring. Drawing on the sociocultural perspective of language learning, Gao (2010) conducted a longitudinal study to investigate the roles of agency in the strategy use of Chinese EFL learners as they moved between Mainland China and Hong Kong. The results suggested that the learners' will and capacity to act or agency had a lot to do with their strategy use, and their strategy use reveals their agency in the learning process.

The above-mentioned studies indicated that although learner agency interacts with learner's learning process in different aspects, there is one thing for sure that the exert of learner agency is profoundly associated with the actions they make, whether it is related to their learning investments or learning strategy use. Nevertheless, little research has investigated how learners exercise their agency as they move across multiple contexts, and how they make sense of the language through the frame of learner agency. Although Gao's (2010) study investigated learners who crossed two learning contexts, Mainland China and Hong Kong, the researcher put more emphasis on the interplay between learner agency and the learning strategy use, not how the

learners exerted agency differently moving across multiple contexts. In the present study, the participant's language learning history crossed three contexts, including formal educational English learning contexts and informal contexts in Taiwan as an EFL learning environment, and overseas context where English is used as the first language. I would like to examine the changing agency and the interaction between the participant and the contexts she was engaged in.

The present study documented the learning experiences that a Taiwanese EFL learner, Erin, had in the past and in the sojourn in the U.K. as a Master's student. I am especially interested in how Erin employed her agency differently across various contexts and what roles that learner agency plays in her learning process. Using narrative inquiry, I attempted to elucidate what it is like for her to learn English in Taiwan and the changes of her perceptions of English in her own English learning process, and how she makes sense of the language while studying abroad in England. The specific research questions were as follows:

1. What are the EFL learning experiences that Erin had in Taiwan before study abroad?
2. What are the experiences Erin had while studying in the U.K. during her pursuit of a Master's degree?
3. What is the role that agency plays in Erin's learning process, and how does she exercise learner agency to cope with the challenges and various scenarios in the different learning contexts: Taiwan and the U.K.?

### Chapter 3 Methodology

The study was conducted as a narrative inquiry. The research process began in the spring of 2014, when the participant, Erin (pseudonym), was accepted as a student by the Master's program of counselling in one of the universities in the U.K. The study ended when Erin finished her study abroad and came back to Taiwan in August of the same year. In the following sections, I would first justify the use of narrative inquiry as the methodology for the present research and then present the protagonist of the story, that is the participant in the study. Later, I would discuss methods for gathering data and approaches for data analysis.

#### **The Research Design: A Narrative Inquiry**

The study investigated how Erin exercised her agency to cope with the challenges in different learning contexts she was engaged in, and the research was conducted through a narrative inquiry. Narratives, as Riessman (2008) noted, are “event-centered and experience-oriented” (p.22). Narratives have been used in many fields of inquiry, such as psychology and sociology. However, only in recent years has narrative become a “legitimate mode of thinking and writing in research,” (Barkhuizen et al., 2014, p. 1) and narrative inquiry is understood as an umbrella term referring to research involving stories, either using stories as research data or using storytelling as a tool for data analysis or presentation of findings (Barkhuizen et al., 2014).

The use of narrative in language learning research is acknowledged and valued since, as Connelly and Clandinin (1990) noted, “...humans are storytelling organisms

who, individually and socially, lead storied lives,” and therefore, “the study of narrative is the study of ways humans experience the world (p. 2).” Barnjkze et al. (2014) also identified the strengths of applying narrative inquiry to the field of language teaching and learning. Complementing experimental or statistical studies in which researchers are more interested in common features of a groups of people and adopt standardized procedures to assess objective reality (Dorneyei, Z., 2007), narrative inquiry focused on lived experiences the individual participant has or had, which can probably best help us to understand the “inner mental worlds of language teachers and learners and the nature of language teaching and learning as social and educational activity” (Barnjkze et al., 2014, p.2).

Drawing the focus on learners, as previous research indicated, through storytelling, the narrative forms, teachers or researchers can obtain insights of individual learner’s learning beliefs (Barcelos, 2008), language identities (Block, 2008; Chik & Benson, 2008), learning investments (Chang, 2011), and agency (Coffey, 2013; Xiao, 2014; Ajsic, 2015) from the perspectives of learners, “the central actor in the drama of language learning” (Cotterall, 2008, p. 113). The nature of the present study was a longitudinal study which looked into the relationship and the interaction the participant, Erin, had with English in multiple contexts, spanning the time from her being a school girl to a mature adult studying abroad for her own expertise with English as the medium language. Under the circumstances, narrative inquiry is justified as the most appropriate method to use since, as Barkhuizen et al. (2014) pointed out, “the most distinctive quality of narrative inquiry is its capacity to provide access to long-term experiences through retrospective and imagination,” and



“narrative inquiry is the only methodology that provides access to language teaching and learning as lived experiences that take place over a long period of time and in multiple settings and contexts,” (p. 12) which is consistent with what this study intended to do.

### *My Role in the Research Process*

I considered myself playing multiple roles in the research process. First of all, as a friend of Erin, I have her trust, friendship, and rapport as the support of this study. I felt certain that she would be willing to serve as the informant throughout the process of this study. Second, as a Taiwanese EFL learner born in the same year as my participant, I knew exactly how the sociocultural context was like when Erin attended school in Taiwan during her formative years. As a researcher, I also needed to have a natural drive to understand what exactly happened to my participant. Although I knew her well and we shared the same learning experience in Taiwan, I did not have the opportunity to understand how she perceived her own experiences, particularly I have no access to her experiences in the U.K. and thus have to depend on her narratives and the interviews to develop a deeper understanding of my participant.

I did not stand in a neutral position, nor was I simply a distant researcher from the participant. Rather, in the interviews, I myself was also an active participant who explored, experienced and reflected on the stories together with Erin. As Mendieta (2013) stresses, the production of the narratives does not belong to an individual; instead, narratives are shaped by “larger social, cultural, and historical contexts as well as the relationship between the narrator and the interlocutor” (p. 139). With such

claim, narratives are both personal and collective (Moen, 2006), it is possible and acceptable that narrative researchers will bring their own worldviews to the inquiry process (Mendieta, 2013).

In the writing process, I re-experienced and reconstructed the narratives not only based on Erin's stories but might inevitably interpret the stories with my own values. As a researcher, I would not and could not be entirely objective, and the narrative approach tradition does allow me to acknowledge my own personal biases and values.

### **Erin, the Protagonist**

Erin was born in 1990. At the time when the thesis was written, she was a twenty-six-year-old research assistant (RA) working in a university in northern Taiwan. She majored in psychology in college and graduated in 2012. In 2014, she went to the U.K. for a Master's degree in counseling. Finishing her one-year study overseas, Erin came back to Taiwan in 2015, working both as a full-time RA in a university and a part-time English tutor in a small-scaled private language institute.

The first time I met Erin was in junior high school. We were in the same class for three years, and we became close friends in the ninth-grade. Graduating from junior high school, we went to different community high schools in the same district. We have been keeping in touch with each other ever since, and we even went to the same university but different departments.

Erin never liked English in her school life, as I can recall. She held quite a resistant attitude toward English learning as a junior high school student, and her

relationship with English became even worse when she was in senior high. I remember her always complaining to me about the heavy study load of English. She could not see the value of spending so much time studying English at a time, and she was not satisfied with Taiwan's educational system, either. In our first interview (August 25, 2014) when Erin gave me an overview of her English learning history from elementary school to the end of college, she stated in her own words: "I hated English through the whole period of senior high school." Erin would even deliberately skip the English class every Tuesday for the whole spring semester of the eleventh grade. With such a struggling relationship with English, Erin failed the subject for at least four consecutive semesters, and no doubt she was defeated in the battle of college entrance exam as well, only getting 18 as her score.

However, the chemistry between Erin and the language has subtly changed ever since the end of senior high school. Breaking away from the formal educational system, Erin began to pick up the language in her own ways. Exposed to a variety of learning sources, Erin's English comprehension gradually improved. She even found a part-time job as a teaching assistant in a private language institute, and later decided to go further her study in psychology in the U.K.

The uniqueness of Erin's case lies in the dramatic change as she interacted with English the language in multiple contexts. As a friend, I have witnessed her stumbling along the way in achieving English proficiency. I am amazed at the progress she made over the years and impressed by her determination and courage to study abroad. As a researcher, I find it worth noting that English for her seems more than just a language to learn, and she actually has a dynamic and subtle relationship with English. When it

comes to *learning* the language in formal schools, the more powerful social discourse she encountered as a young adult learner, Erin was determined to shut herself off from the language. Graduating from senior high, however, Erin appeared to make peace with the language: she was *getting along with* the language instead of just learning it. While studying abroad, Erin was *using* the language she once hated as the medium to develop her expertise, counseling. At that time, English was no longer just a subject to study, and Erin was gradually aware of the fact that language was actually a way of thinking.

In the multiple contexts with the variety of social discourses that she encountered, Erin seemed to act as an active agent who purposefully and consciously decided if she was going to accept, ignore, or resist what the context offered her instead of the other way around.

I, as a researcher, appreciated Erin for giving me the chance to *walk beside* her, exchanging life stories with each other while she was in England. More importantly, I appreciated the fact that Erin did not mind reflecting on, re-experiencing, and reconstructing her past and present English learning journey with me. The next section discusses how we walk through the journey together.

### **Data Collection**

Two instruments were adopted for data collection: interviews and some written records, including Erin's posts on Facebook, the chatting records between Erin and I via Facebook and LINE, a widely-used communication application (app) in Taiwan.

### *Storytelling and Interviews*

The data on Erin's past learning experiences and current perceptions was mainly collected from interviews with Erin. Interviews, as Barkhuizen et al. (2014) pointed out, are probably the most suitable instrument to access personal perspectives on language learning, and a life history approach was adopted in the study. The approach "concerns a person's life story through his/her own retelling" (p.16) and is used in narrative inquiry to capture long-term language learning experiences.

I conducted the first interview with Erin before she left for the U.K. in August, 2014. The interviews continued via Skype while she was in England so that I could gain process data, closely tracking her life experiences in the U.K. The last interview was conducted after she came back from her study in September, 2015. Altogether there are 14 hours of formal interviews conducted over the period of 13 months, mounting up to 95 pages of transcript, not to mention many face-to-face and skype-mediated informal conversations. Table 1 shows the interview timeline, with all the dates, foci, and other details for each of the formal interviews.

*Table 1*

*The interview timeline*

Year	Date	Interview Foci
2014	August 25	<b>Narrating and reflecting on the past English learning experiences</b> ● Initial prompt: <i>Would you please tell me your story of English learning from the time when you knew the existence of English?</i>
	September 7	<b>Open and Unstructured Interview on the First Week in the U.K.</b>

- 
- Initial Prompt: *Would you tell me about your first-week life experience in the U.K.?*
  - Her responses included:
    - First impressions of the country and people there
    - Solving problems she encountered
    - Interaction with the English people
    - Meeting up with other Taiwanese and Chinese students
- 

### **Open and Unstructured Interview on the Second Week in the U.K.**

- September 14
- Opening Question: *Are there anything interesting happening this week you would like to talk about?*
  - Her responses included:
    - First pub experience
    - Participated in all kinds of activities held by the dormitory or the Department and interacted with people from different countries
    - The courses that she was taking
- 

### **Semi-structured Interview on the Third Week in the U.K. and the Courses that She was Taking**

- September 21
- Interview Protocol
    - *Now that the semester has officially begun, and one of the four classes you took, the research methods class, just started. Could you tell me how the class works and how do you feel about the class?*
    - *How do you feel and what do you think of studying your profession with English as a medium?*
    - *Could you tell me how you prepare for the*
-

*class?*

- *This is your third week living in the U.K. Is the life there similar to what you imagined when you were still in Taiwan, or is it actually quite different from what you thought?*
- *Are there any other special experiences you would like to share with me?*

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### **Semi-structured Interview on the Fourth Week and the Courses that She was Taking**

- **Interview Protocol**

- September 27
- *So far you have experienced both of the two required courses, the research methods course and the certificate course. How do you feel and what do you think of these two courses?*
  - *Have you had difficulties regarding the English language when you prepare for the courses?*
  - *Have you had difficulties regarding the English language when you are in the class?*
  - *Are there any other special experiences you would like to share with me?*

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September 29 Erin's oral narrative (an audio-recorded narrative) on course experiences

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October 2 Erin's oral narrative (an audio-recorded narrative) Narrating course experiences

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### **Open Interview on Courses**

- October 12
- *Opening question: How are your courses going? Would you like to share anything interesting or the difficulties you encountered this week?*
-

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## Semi-structured Interview on Past Learning

### Experiences:

- **Interview Protocol**

- *In one of our previous interviews, you mentioned that you had thought about dropping school in high school. Why did you have this thought at that time?*
- *Previously, you also mentioned that you did not like your high school English teachers' attitudes and ways of teaching. Could you talk more about it?*
- *You have said you "hated" English when you were in high school. What made you think so, and what did you think of English then?*
- *I am also curious about why you liked the subject of History and that of Geography so much in high school. What made you like these two subject so much?*

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### Part I: Narrating course experience (continued)

### Part II: Semi-structured Interview on Comparison and Contrast between the UK and TW:

- **Interview Protocol**

October 18

- *What are the differences in how courses are conducted here and in Taiwan?*
  - *How do you feel about speaking English in class and during group discussion? Are you already used to it?*
  - *Do you like the way how courses are conducted in the U.K.?*
  - *We have talked about the content learning experiences. How about language learning? In such an English-only*
-



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*learning environment, do you find it helpful for you to learn the language?*

- *If you got a chance to go back to junior high and senior high school, what kind of changes could have made you learn the language better, or made you like English more?*
- 

### **Open Interview on Courses Taken**

- *Opening question: How are your courses going? How is everything going this week? Would you like to share anything interesting or the difficulties you encounter?*

### **Semi-structured Interview on Interaction and Relationships with Others as well as Views on Different Learning Contexts**

#### **● Interview Protocol**

- *Last time you mentioned that you accompanied one of your Taiwanese classmates to take an additional listening class, and the class already finished. Could you talk about the experiences of taking that listening class?*
  - *Last time you discussed the period of time when you were learning English with a professor. You also talked about the differences of the learning environment at my home and at his place. Could you talk more about how differently you perceive the professor as your English teacher and the English teachers you had in high school?*
  - *In our first interview, you mentioned that you had started to watch*
- 

October 26

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*American/English TV series in the summer before you went to college. Could you talk more about this experience?*

---

### **Open and Unstructured Interview**

- Opening Question: *Are there anything interesting happening this week you would like to talk about?*
- Her responses included:
  - First experience of participating in a parade
  - Self-perception on her own English competency while in England

November 1

### **Semi-structured Interview on the TA Working Experiences in the Private Language Institute**

- **Interview Protocol**
  - *Last time you talked about your job interview experience in the private language institute. Can you talk about your first day at work?*
  - *How would you feel when you see the international teachers/colleges? How is your interaction with the international teachers/colleges at and off work?*

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### **Narrating on the academic aspects and life for the past half year**

2015

January 9

Interview prompt: *Would you please summarize your experiences while studying abroad for the past six months?*

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**Narrating and reflecting on the study abroad  
experiences/stories**

September 17

Interview prompt: *Would you please summarize your experiences while studying abroad?*

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The first meeting was a face-to-face interview scheduled on 25 of August, 2015, before Erin went to the U.K. for the pursuit of her master's degree. The interview was conducted in her home, an environment she felt most comfortable with. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) noted, it is important to give the *voice* to the participant: "In narrative inquiry, it is important that the researcher listen first to the practitioner's story, and that it is the practitioner who first tells his or her story" (p. 4). Reissman (2008) also indicated the special quality of narrative interview: "the interviewer and the interviewee are two active participants who jointly construct narrative and meaning," (p.23) and the interviews aimed to generate detailed accounts rather than brief answers or general statements. In our first interview, I only gave Erin a prompt to start her story: *Would you please tell me your stories of English learning from the time when you know the existence of English the language?* While Erin was telling the story, I acted as an active listener and jotted down notes, allowing Erin enough time and space to speak without being interrupted so that "it [the interview process] too gains the authority and validity that the research story has long had" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4).

A few days after the first interview, Erin headed for England, and the subsequent interviews were conducted through video calls using Skype. I had thought that Erin would encounter great changes in her life since this was the first time she stayed abroad, so we talked to each other almost every week in the first two months. By

doing so, I could not only give her emotional support but closely follow her life and changing perceptions while she was trying to adjust to the new environment as well as living and studying abroad. On September 29<sup>th</sup> and October 2<sup>nd</sup>, Erin sent me two recorded audio files in which she orally narrated her course experiences. In her own words, she explained the contents of the two recorded audio files were the “dark side” of her, which I assumed she wanted to tell me but did not intent to discuss in detail in our interviews.

From November, 2014 to the time she returned to Taiwan in August, 2015, we only held interview three times since Erin got more used to the life there and became busier with her schoolwork. The last interview was conducted on 17 September, 2015, one month after her return with an M.A. degree. We had our last meeting in the McDonald’s near Erin’s home when we had dinner together, and Erin summarized her living and studying experience in England in retrospection.

As to the form of interviews, narrative interviews, open or unstructured interviews, and semi-structured interviews were adopted, and each interview lasted 90-120 minutes. The nature of narrative interviews, as mentioned above, allows the informant to narrate her experiences as a whole without being interrupted, and the researcher only gives a prompt as a starter when the interview begins. The use of narrative interview in the very beginning gave me a full story of Erin’s past English learning history, and the use of the narrative interview in the last also helped me to have a complete account of Erin’s study abroad experiences in the U.K.

An open interview, as Barkhuizen et al. (2014) cited Richards (2003, p.65), is “a journey within a journey.” The informants are given ample freedom to direct the

interview, exploring the events or themes they believe worth sharing (p.21). This interview form was adopted in the first few weeks when Erin just arrived at the U.K. since I had no idea what her life was like. We just had casual conversations in the first place so that I could piece up her life there little by little. Not only talking about her life there, I would also share things happening in my life; we basically exchanged information about our recent lives with each other.

While conducting each interview, I would jot down notes, and I would review my notes at the end of the interview to see if there emerged some issues that could be further discussed in our next interview. While continued closely following her life abroad, I started to further discuss her past language learning experiences in retrospect as well in the following interview sessions, which were conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews. By doing so, I gathered both the process and retrospective data at the same time, giving the participant a chance to discuss and cross-exam both her past and current language learning experiences (Barkhuizen et al., 2014).

All the interviews were tape-recorded, and the contents of the interviews were transcribed verbatim for further analysis. As for the language used in the interviews, Erin could choose to communicate with me in Mandarin Chinese, English, or Taiwanese as long as she felt most comfortable expressing herself, but she most often used our shared language, Mandarin.

### *Written Records*

The written records gathered during the research process include Erin's postings on Facebook and the chatting records Erin and I had through Facebook and LINE.

Nowadays, Facebook has become one of the most popular social networking sites which seems to be the most direct and quickest path for people to share their feelings, thoughts and everything in life with one another around the world. LINE, on the other hand, is one of the communication applications with high frequency of utilization in Taiwan.

Erin used Facebook from time to time to share her life in England, and sometimes I would use her postings on Facebook as an opener for our interview. Erin's postings sometimes would go with some pictures so that I could better understand the events she described in the interview. In addition to the scheduled interviews, we would also use Facebook or LINE to contact each other randomly and frequently. Our text-based chatting records as well as Erin's Facebook postings were kept automatically by the website, generating additional data regarding Erin's perceptions of English learning useful for triangulating the collected interview and narrative data.

### **Data Analysis**

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) suggested by Smith and Osborn (2007) was adopted for data analysis in this study. IPA is a form of in-depth qualitative analysis which aims to explore how participants interpret and experience their personal and social world. The approach allows the researcher to examine the participant's personal experience and life world in detail, focusing on the individual's subjective perception toward an event without trying to generate an objective statement of the event itself. The analyzing process would be a double interpretation

process since it involves the “participants trying to make sense of their world” on the one hand and the researcher “trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world” on the other hand (p. 53).

The IPA approach consists of several phases which will be discussed here. First, as I mentioned earlier, all the interview data were transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were read for several times to help me familiarize the contents. While reading the transcripts, I kept the following questions in mind, suggested by Smith and Osborn (2007): “What is the person trying to achieve here?” “Is something leaking out here that wasn’t intended?” “Do I have a sense of something going on here that maybe the participants themselves are less aware of?” (p. 53) These questions assisted me to be more critical while reading the transcripts. At the same time, I jotted down notes on the margin of the transcripts to record my initial impressions of, responses to or any insights I had of the participants’ words.

During the second phase of the analysis, I returned to the beginning of the transcripts and used different colors to identify similar themes emerging from the data. I still treated the transcript as a single entity without an attempt to omit or select certain passages for special attention, yet I tried to convert the initial notes to concise phrases or higher level expressions to better grasp “the essential quality of what was found in the text (p. 68)”. After giving titles to the emergent themes, I went through the transcript again and typed a list of all the themes I found in the sequence as they came up in the transcript on a Word file.

The next phase was to figure out the connections between the themes. I rearranged the sequence of the themes, clustered the similar or related ones together,

and made a hierarchical order of the cluster of the themes; that is, to see if there were some themes superordinating others. Later, I will go back to the transcript, the original source material, to see if the connections do make sense.

Finally, I arranged the themes in a coherent order. Each cluster of themes went with a superordinate concept, and each theme was accompanied by an instance or instances from the transcript with the line number and page number so that it was easier for me to check where the instances came from the transcript back and forth.

With the IPA procedure, I was able to engage myself in the text deeper in the process of interpreting and making sense of the participant's story and experiences. However, I was careful not to cut the participant's story into small fragments, for one of the characteristics of narrative inquiry is to view the informant's story and experience as a whole. While reflecting and reconstructing Erin's narratives, I wrote her story in a chronological order but centered on critical events. The interpretation and analysis of Erin's story were discussed later after the presentation of Erin's story.

In addition to the interview transcripts, Erin's Facebook postings and our chatting records via Facebook and LINE were documented, particularly when she expressed her views on English the language and the context that she was situated in. Since I could not observe Erin's actions in the U.K., her Facebook postings helped me to picture the events she participates in and understand her feelings at the moment. All these online data spontaneously emerged from life were basically used to triangulate the interview data.



### *The Issue of Trustworthiness and Generalizability*

For the issue of trustworthiness, one thing worth noting is that the findings of narrative inquiry studies are recognized as “subjective” and “interpretive” (Barkhuizen et al., 2007, p. 88). To guard the trustworthiness of the study, first I had Erin read her stories after I reconstructed into written narratives as a way of member checking. In the process, I also had her check if there were any parts that I might have miswritten or misinterpreted her experiences. Second, with the prolonged engagement, that is, 13 months of data collection, and multiple in-depth interviews, similar topics and experiences were discussed more than one time, allowing me to be certain that the data was trustworthy. Each time Erin herself, and I would reflect, re-experience, compare and contrast or even cross-examine her experiences in Taiwan and abroad together, and thus I would have a deeper understanding of her experiences and sketch a more complete picture of what the experiences were like, or even gain more insights into one issue.

For the issue of generalizability, the study focused on a particular individual and made no attempt to generalize the results. As Polkinghorne (1995) argues, “the cumulative effect of narrative reasoning is a collection of individual cases in which thought moves from case to case instead of from case to generalization” (p.11). Thus, with rich and detailed description and analysis of a particular case, the study hoped to arouse a resonance with the readers, in addition to reaching the goal of the study: That is, achieving theoretical generalization through delineating and shedding lights on how language learner agency functions and changes across multiple contexts.

## Chapter 4 Findings

### The Narrative Accounts of Erin's English Learning Journey

This chapter is the reconstruction of Erin's English learning journey from the interview data, and her story was presented chronologically.

The story begins from the day she knew the existence of the language, and is divided into three parts. Each part is given a main title, under which several subtitles are provided, documenting the critical events happening during the period. Each subtitle is accompanied by a quotation from the participant as which is the most descriptive to that period of time.

The first part is entitled "What is English?", documenting Erin's first impression of English and how she struggled with English learning in middle schools. The second part is entitled "Breaking Dawn", describing how she reconnected to English, her changed perceptions of the language, and the reason why she decided to go abroad for further study. The third part is entitled "New World. New Life.", delineating how English naturally became a part of her life and the difficulties she encountered in academic life. The chapter finally ends up with Erin's reflection on her relationship with English and how she made sense of English.

Although the story is divided into three parts, it should be viewed as a whole since everything happened in one's life is actually intertwined.

## Part I: What is English?

First Impression of English:

*“I was happy in the English class, and there were lots of stories in the textbook.”*

In the beginning of Erin’s experience, she needed to first of all make sense of what English is. Erin was born in 1990. When she attained elementary school, the new curriculum guideline, Grade 1-9 Curriculum Guideline, was just implemented. Students began to take English class in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, twice a week. Her impression of English classes then was mostly about storytelling, and she considered the classes playful and interesting.

I did not go to cram schools for English learning. I started to take English class in 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade. [...] I was happy then. I remember [one lesson] in the textbook is a story about an alien, an alien coming to the earth and wants to be friends with people, something like that, and everything was in English. [...] I liked English and thought it fun at that time.

Erin did not remember much about English learning then in elementary school, but she clearly found learning English less enjoyable after going to junior high school. In junior high, English learning equals memorization for Erin. To deal with lots of vocabulary quizzes and unit tests, she needed to memorize vocabulary. She did not understand why she needed to spend so much time studying a language she would not

use in daily life; she also found it meaningless to memorize English words just to pass exams:

I am not a person who likes memorizing things. If the subjects are taught in Chinese, such as Chinese, History, or Geography, it would not take much time to study after school since I am familiar with the language, and I can memorize the contents very quickly. English, however, you have to memorize [the vocabulary]. After you go home you have to spend time memorizing [it], and I am the kind of person who is lazy about memorizing [things].

The more Erin felt it wasting of time memorizing vocabulary, the more unwilling she became to study, and hence the poorer performance she had. Hardly understanding the teacher's lecture and not being able to catch up with her class mates, Erin gradually developed a resistant attitude toward English learning, and a vicious circle therefore formed. The situation became worse when she went to senior high school.

Falling in the gap:

*"Is my life all about learning English? I am DONE<sup>3</sup> with it."*

Attending high school, Erin's perception of English changed sharply from dislike to hate. "It was in high school that I started to hate English. I hated to study English

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<sup>3</sup> Capitalized letters are used from time to time in chapter 4. This is to mark the participant's manner of speaking, such as emphasizing an event, or to capture the participant's emotion, like being anxious, nervous, passionate, extremely unsatisfied, or overjoyed.

very, very much,” said she with contempt. She sensed a great gap between junior high and senior high school, in terms of the difficulty level of vocabulary and grammar. What was worse, the loading of schoolwork increased. Not just English, she basically had trouble with all the subjects, and her academic performance usually ranked second or third from the last. High school was a high-stressed learning environment for Erin, and she did not have better performance after a year of attempting to adjust. She even thought about dropping out of school. Among all the subjects, Erin hated English most. She took an extreme action to avoid English studying by deliberately skipping the first period of English class every Tuesday morning for the whole spring semester in 11<sup>th</sup> grade:

I lied to the teacher that I needed to go to the hospital for the check-up for my wrist pain every Tuesday morning so that I could skip the class. I could not let my parents know about this, so I would leave home on time, take a bus and wonder around, and enter the school around 8:30. Then, I would hide in the bathroom, wait until 9:00 when the English class finished, and entered the classroom. Crazy, right?

Further discussing why she hated English so much, Erin mentioned two factors: the heavy workload and her English teacher’s teaching attitude. In high school, Erin needed to not only study the vocabulary, grammar and the reading texts in the textbook, but also the teacher-assigned self-learning English magazines as supplementary out-of-class reading materials. In addition, there was a 4000-word

vocabulary book waiting for her to memorize. Erin asked herself, “Is my life all about learning English? Don’t I need to study other subjects? Why on earth do you think you have the right to ask me to study so much English?” She actually shouted out loud her negative emotions as she recounted the experience during our interview at her home. Since she almost gave up on English in the tenth grade, it was more difficult for her trying to catch up with other classmates later on:

We needed to study one to two pages of the self-learning English magazine every day, but the materials were quite hard for me. [...] It might be enough for others to spend five to ten minutes on studying the magazine, but it would take me at least thirty minutes or even an hour to finish an article. How would I want to do that?

Erin felt swamped with English vocabulary, grammatical points, and reading materials that she could hardly breathe, not to mention that there were other subjects waiting in line to be studied. She became more and more reluctant to invest time on English, and the result was that she failed English for four consecutive semesters during tenth and eleventh grade.

In addition to the heavy study load, her English teachers’ attitudes also brought her negative experiences with English. She indicated a paradox that high school English teachers would not teach many grammatical points since they believed most of the grammatical knowledge had already been taught in junior high school, and students must have mastered it. They often chose to skip grammar completely. “I did

know those grammar points, but the problem is that I had not mastered them,” said Erin with laughters.

Another English teacher Erin had happened to be the homeroom teacher of the English-talented class in school. Erin thought that the teacher could never put herself in low-achievers’ shoes and did not understand how they felt about English learning since the teacher had always been successful in her own language learning. Erin even felt that she was already given up by the teacher because she showed pejorative attitude toward her, thinking that she was helpless, and there was no chance for her to learn English well.

Not only English, she was basically struggling in all the subjects in her first year in high school. Later, it was her interests in History and Geography that made her take her academic performance seriously, but still, she put English aside, completely out of her mind.

During the time I was preparing for the college entrance exam, I could do a sample test on History answering three hundred practice questions a day, but I never studied English. I didn’t want to memorize a word. I didn’t even want to open the book.

The consequence is that she was defeated in the battle of college entrance exam, scoring only 18 out of the total 100 points on the subject of English. “I was incapable of and unwilling to read the questions, so I just guessed. I think the grade is pretty much acceptable,” said Erin, laughing out loud.

## Part II: Breaking Dawn

Craze for TV Series:

*“I would watch CSI all day during the summer vacation before entering college.”*

As Erin moved to college, her relationship with English was gradually changing for the better. This was all because of the American dramas she enjoyed on TV. During the summer vacation after the college entrance exam, Erin started to watch *CSI*, *Grey’s Anatomy*, and other American TV series to kill time. When associating the experience with English learning, she affirmed that it dramatically helped to improve her listening comprehension and her perception of English. The turning point was the Chinese subtitles of the online TV shows:

I am telling you a funny thing. One time I was watching an episode, and the Chinese translation sucked, really sucked. I remember [in the episode] there was someone needed to be saved, and he needed oxygen, and the doctor asked the assistant aside, or the nurse, to give him nitric oxide, that is NO, but the translation said “No, now” (laugh out loud). I think it’s ridiculous! Since then, I realized that I could not fully trust the Chinese translation, so I started to pay more attention to the translation if I found it strange.

Initially, when watching TV shows, she would usually read the Chinese subtitles first to know what the characters were saying, and then go back to see the acting. She would then watch the scene again to match the English sound, the



meanings of the lines, and the acting parts. This process would take Erin 90 minutes or so to finish a 30-minute-long episode.

Erin's love of American TV series prompted her to look for news, information, or songs related to the TV show. She mentioned that many enthusiastic fans would edit some of their favorite clips from different episodes into a short film and arrange a song for it. She liked to watch those films and enjoyed the songs. To understand what the songs were about, she searched for the English lyrics and sang with the songs. Erin especially mentioned that she would not read the Chinese translation of the lyrics since she believed that there was definitely a discrepancy between the two languages:

It's like you won't translate Li Bai's poems into English. It will be really weird. So I don't want to [read the Chinese translation of English lyrics]. I want to feel it.

While listening to English songs, Erin would look up the unknown words in the dictionary and this action gradually enlarged her vocabulary; however, she could not check the dictionary while watching TV shows because she did not know how to spell the word she heard, so she just listened to it. In fact, she did not intentionally train her listening comprehension via watching TV series. Her improvement on English listening comprehension was simply the byproduct of her craze for TV shows, as she stated, "I did not deliberately train my listening comprehension. I just wanted to watch TV! I watched the shows because I loved to, not because I wanted to improve my English. For me, these are two different things."

Having a Taste of Success:

*“I am awesome! I cannot believe I passed the English interview!”*

Although Erin’s intention of watching English TV series was not to study English, the large amount of time she invested on those TV shows actually exposed herself to the language extensively. The result was not only her improvement on listening comprehension; more importantly, she felt that her overall English competence leveled up:

Let me tell you. If your listening comprehension improved, your English competence improves as well. [...] The thing is that when you are listening to those characters talk, they would not just say a word, right? They must put words in sentences. So, if your listening comprehension improves, you will have a better sense of the language. Once you have a better sense of the language, your grammar will improve as well, and finally you will have a better grasp of the language. Besides, since you listen to English more often, you will find yourself less afraid of speaking the language.

English TV series acted as a catalyst for her English learning. With three to four-year’s experience of watching TV series, her attitude toward and perception of English changed sharply, and she even dared to apply for a part-time job as a teaching

assistant (TA) in an English-only language school when she was a junior in college. She believed that it was the experience of watching TV series that helped her pass the interview and get the job. In high school, she would rather die than open her mouth to speak English, but then, having received a great deal of listening input from TV shows, she regained confidence about her speaking ability. “At least I know what I say won’t be too ridiculous,” said she.

The job interview went better than she had imagined. As soon as the interview finished, Erin called everyone in her phonebook to brag about how good she was. “Right then, I really thought that I was awesome! It is unbelievable that I could pass an English interview,” she cried.

Soon after, Erin set off on a journey in the language school working as a TA. Her job included marking children’s assignments, correcting students’ test sheets, and reviewing the key grammatical points for kids. She mentioned that she did not learn English well in secondary school. She could not spell many simple words, or she could not even recognize some of them. Since the children had vocabulary test every week and she needed to check their test performance, Erin repetitively see those words and gradually she was able to pick up these words:

“So, maybe the names of some vegetables and fruit...” Erin laughed.

“Yap, I remember you said words like ‘cucumber,’ right? You asked me if I knew the word.”

“Yes, words like ‘lettuce,’ ‘cucumber,’ and ‘cabbage.’ I learned those words with the kids.

Erin’s working experience in the language school was quite an important stage during her English learning process. In addition to picking up basic vocabulary with children, she also spoke frequently to English native speakers who also worked as teaching staff in the same language school. She did not deliberately learn the language, but she was consciously using the language, and she made a great progress in her English proficiency because of using the language.

Turning Over a New Leaf:

*“Studying abroad was quite popular among psychology majors, and I started to think maybe I could go study abroad as well.”*

Erin originally chose History as her major in college, but soon she found out that it was not the subject she wanted to explore. Later, she decided to take the transfer exam to study Psychology. To prepare for the exam, she signed up for a statistics course and an English course in a cram school:

I think the English teacher taught well. He probably knew that those who signed up for the English course in order to prepare for the transfer exam were comparatively lower achievers, so he explained grammatical points in a way that was easy for me to understand. It was then that I started to have a better

understanding of English grammar. Maybe it's also because I became more mature so that I could have a better grasp of grammatical concepts. Plus, with his clear explanations, I found it not so difficult to answer those multiple choice questions.

However, Erin did not take the transfer exam eventually; she just transferred to another department, the Department of Psychology, in the original university.

Majoring in psychology, Erin needed to read many English textbooks. Also, she found most of the professors had studied abroad, and studying abroad was kind of a trend rather popular among psychology majors, which made her put studying abroad into consideration as a goal for the future.

Graduating from college, she once thought about going to Australia or New Zealand for working holiday, but in the end she made up her mind to pursue a master's degree in counseling in the U.K. To study in the U.K., she needed to take the IELTS test, and this time she chose to prepare the test by herself by doing sample tests. She took the test twice, scoring 6 out of the full mark 9 for the first time and 6.5, the second time, which allowed her to attend the graduate school right away, without the need to spend time in the language school first as many of the international students did. "I have never been away from home, so I really wanted to explore the world. I wanted to learn to live independently, and experience a different life from the one that I have had in Taipei," Erin said in our first interview with excitement.

Looking back, Erin's whole English learning process in Taiwan is bittersweet. Under formal education in secondary school, she hated English so much that she was reluctant to invest any time studying the subject. However, English TV series and the working experience in the language school accidentally opened a gate for her to the world of English, shortening the gap between her and the language. Finally, she even decided to go abroad for the pursuit of a master's degree. Studying abroad was no doubt a new page of her life, and a brand-new journey was waiting for her.

### Part III: New World. New Life.

Arriving in the U.K.:

*"I can survive here, but I can't live here."*

Arriving in the U.K., Erin first stayed in a hostel for a few days since the dormitory was not available yet. She once sent a LINE message (in Chinese) to me saying, "I think I can survive here, but I can't live here." I asked her to elaborate more in our later interview, and she explained:

Because I stayed in a hostel at first, where eight people shared a room. When you entered the room, all the people would greet you. They would actively say hello to me, and I...I don't know. I just couldn't have conversations with them. I had no problem asking for directions or for things, but I had difficulty having conversations [with them]. ... There were three or four people who could speak

German, so they constantly talked with each other in German, and I would just roll my eyes (laugh). And on the last day when I stayed in the hostel, there came a Chinese, and I kept speaking Chinese with her, which made me feel sooooo<sup>4</sup> great!

Although Erin mentioned more than one time that she was not a social person, she did take initiative to talk to people whose native language was not Mandarin. One time she went to a pub with a group of Taiwanese friends and a Chinese student. Getting bored, one of Erin's Taiwanese friends proposed that they played rock-paper-scissors, and the one who lost needed to talk to five guys whose native language was not Mandarin. Angel, a girl from Mainland China, lost the game. Greatly anxious, she started to drink fast, trying to get herself drunk. Then, Erin, who could not stand it anymore, spoke, "I'll go with you." "How generous you are!" I said. "Yes, and I was actually shocked when I heard myself say that," said Erin. She continued, "At that time, I thought 'screw it' because the pub was dark, and no one would know me anyway." However, Erin did all the talking, and Angle just stood beside her, in silence. "It should be Angle that needed to hit on a stranger, but it turned out that it was me who kept talking to that guy!" said Erin, rolling her eyes.

On the second week, Erin participated in the welcome party held by the Department, and she also took initiative to come forward talking with excitement to an Irish girl just to express her wish to visit Ireland:

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<sup>4</sup> This written form stresses the informant's tone of speaking, meaning she was making emphasis.

Oh, and I did something crazy (laugh). Not that crazy, but... When I saw one of my classmates talking to an Irish girl, I walked to them and said to the Irish girl, “OH~I want to visit your country so much!” And the Irish girl said, “Seriously?” And she asked me my name, and I said I was Erin, and she was surprised because “Erin” meant Ireland. And I said, “That’s the proof!”

Slowly and Surely, English Becomes a Part of Life:

*“I said to him, ‘We just want to know if the library will open today,’ so ~<sup>5</sup>~ smoothly that I myself was surprised.”*

Daily conversation was no problem for Erin, as she mentioned in earlier interviews. As she gradually adapted to life in England, English slowly and surely became part of her life:

There is a seminary next to our dorm, and I got to know there was a library in the seminary a few days ago. So, I think it will be more convenient if we can study there (because it takes a while to go to the main library), and we (Erin and one of her Taiwanese friends) decided to go there to see if it was okay to study there.

After doing the laundry yesterday morning, we went there, but we couldn’t open the door. Then, I saw someone cleaning the office next to the library, so I went in the office and asked him if the library would open today. After talking to him, I was like ‘Oh God how could I say it so smoothly!’ (laugh) because usually I still

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<sup>5</sup> The use of the symbol“~” refers to the interviewee’s prolonged intonation.



need to think in Chinese first in my head before asking things.” “What did you say exactly?” I asked. “I said... oh I said, ‘We just want to know if the library will open today,’ so~~smoothly that I myself was surprised.”

Erin also made friends with other international students. She taught some of them to knit. She would directly walk to a girl and praised her scarf just because she thought it looked beautiful on her. She also dared to argue with people to fight for her rights. One episode was that she asked for a refund of the extra-charged printing fee. She went to the library to print out some reading materials. She did not get the right materials, though the procedure she took to operate the machine was correct, and the fee had already been charged. Erin was pretty upset about this. She told her Taiwanese friend, Sharon, that she was going to ask the person in the help desk for a refund, and she succeeded. “Do you have a sense of achievement when you successfully ask for the money back?” I asked. “Nope. I think this is my money, and I want it back. That’s all.”

The biggest difference of speaking English in Taiwan and in here is that you might not even dare to speak English [in Taiwan] since you will feel embarrassed once [the sentence] you speak is grammatically wrong. When people hear you speak English, they judge you. Even though they might not intend to do so, but you will still feel that you are being judged. But in here, people will accept the fact that you might make some mistakes while speaking. That doesn’t matter as long as you reach the purpose of communication.

Academic Life:

*“I might not be a top student in Taiwan, but I am considered an intelligent person; coming here, I found myself considered a fool!”*

Daily conversation is one thing, but speaking up in class is another. The real challenge came with the beginning of the semester. Erin took two required courses and two optional courses<sup>6</sup> in the first semester. The course bothered her most was Between Counselling and Research I (BCR1), which was a research methods class. The class consisted of two parts: the professor’s lecture and seminar group discussions led by PhD students. Erin was “shocked to death” at the first class since she did not finish the required reading materials, and that her group members were all older than she, some of whom were already practicing counselling professionals. Erin felt embarrassed and awkward sitting in the classroom, especially when the leading PhD student looking at them one by one, expecting each of them to contribute some ideas from the paper that they had read or from the group discussion, but all Erin could do was stare at the floor. “I might not be some top student in Taiwan, but I am considered an intelligent person; coming here, I found myself considered a fool!” Erin stated with distress.

By instinct, Erin skipped the class in the following week. Erin did not tell me she had skipped the class in the interview; instead, she sent me a recorded audio file in which she narrated her feelings:

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<sup>6</sup> Optional courses here refer to elective courses. The word optional was used because this is the participant’s original word. In our interview, the participant uses the phrase “optional courses” all the time.

Today is September 29th. Monday. Last Wednesday I faked being sick. That was the first time I skipped a class while studying in graduate school. I skipped the class because I wasn't able to finish the reading materials in time. And...I don't know...After the professor's lecture, we had group discussion, and there were a lot of PhD students in our group, and everyone seemed to be very...hardworking, and all of us needed to talk, but I couldn't understand the reading materials at all, and basically I hadn't been able to finish reading them. I didn't want to read those materials because the information was so boring (laugh). Okay, I know this is not good, but I still need to...Hmm, this is the dark side. [...] So, I still do what I used to do in Taiwan, avoiding the reality, doing the assignment or studying until the last minute. This is me, and I can't do anything about it (laugh with bitterness). But now everything is in English, so I can't put it off and have everything done at the last minute. But, it's the same old habit, so... I need to adjust myself little by little. [...] [In the seminar group] There are probably only three to four students in a group, so you have to speak, and you have to speak in front of the class. So, I am really anxious right now, but I can't cut the class again. I can't fake being sick, and this course only lasts for ten weeks, and this is the third week. [...] But, I'm not coming here for fun. I need to work. So, that's it.

This audio file is diary-like, vividly delineating Erin's predicament. As she described, this is the dark side of her. When Erin had problems, she did what she used to do—avoiding, her same old habit while studying in Taiwan. However, deep in her

heart she knew she could not continue skipping class since she was not here “for fun.”

Erin quickly put herself together and face the challenge.

Stepping out for change:

“Yes! I finally say something useful!”

Erin was not ready to talk about her experience of skipping a class until a few weeks later, but she did keep the promise she made to herself that she would never miss a class again. What was even better was the fact that she began to seize the chance to express her ideas in class in the following weeks: she added some points to her partner’s summary, and she shared her views about the paper under discussion. In another required course, she pinpointed an important issue during group discussion, and one of the group members, from Nigeria, complimented her saying that Erin always had some good points. “Yes! I finally said something useful!” she yelled with excitement in her mind.

Comparing the differences of course conducted in Taiwan and in England, Erin explained that there was barely any chance for group discussion when she studied psychology in Taiwan; however, in England, most of the courses that she took required everyone to express their ideas. In her learning experiences in Taiwan, Erin was not much of a talker in class since she was afraid that what she said in class would be considered “stupid”; however, being here in the U.K., all the students were encouraged to speak, whether the view made sense or not. “I used to think of those

who keep raising their hands and expressing opinions in class strange, but it's the other way around here. If you don't speak, you are the strange one."

Another cultural difference Erin experienced regarding speaking in class was that students would just start to speak without raising hands first. This practice was not similar to what Taiwanese students were educated since young, and it bothered her very much:

In Taiwan, we were taught to raise hands before you want to say something, right? But they [students here] don't. They speak once they think of something to say, and it happens quite often that two people would want to say something at the same time. When that happens, one person will say "Sorry" and let the other speak first, and then the person who wants to speak in the first place will proceed. I think of this situation awkward, and I need to try to find a good timing to squeeze in, but when I want to say something there are ALWAYS other people coming ahead of me, and I end up saying NOTHING. WHY ON EARTH CAN'T THEY RAISE THEIR HAND BEFORE THEY ARE GOING TO SPEAK?

Another problem Erin had was "face issue." Erin is a rather self-conscious person. She expects the arguments she makes to be clear and logical. She has no problem making arguments in Mandarin, and she can always express her ideas logically; using English, however, she needs to rehearse what she is going to say in her mind for many times. She needs to consider not only the points she wants to make but also the language forms, such as subject-verb agreement and the tense.

“Previously, I would pay attention to the tense. I would say ‘He is...’ and later I would correct myself and say ‘oh, He was...,’ and they [ the other students] would just look at me and smile...But now I seldom do that. I don’t know it’s because I don’t focus on the problem anymore, or I would no longer make that kind of mistakes,” stated Erin. When asked if she would rehearse what she was going to say in daily conversations, Erin answered:

Nope. Daily conversations are different from expressing opinions in class. I won’t rehearse in daily conversations. Although sometimes I know what I say might sound strange, I’m willing to speak. However, when speaking in class or in group discussion, I need to think for a while and rehearse what I’m going to say in my head before speaking.

Reflecting on her one-year adventure in England:

“It is not a ‘great’ thing; it is just something accomplishable.”

In the final interview, Erin reflected on her one-year adventure in England and her relationship with English. She did not consider the experience something great or difficult; she thought that she just went for the challenge and accomplished this task.

In the beginning of the study, Erin specifically stressed more than one time that her language competence was sufficient for her to survive but insufficient to live there since she found it difficult and awkward to have casual conversations in English with people coming from different countries. “Listening to other people talk isn’t a

problem for me because my listening comprehension is not bad, but when I need to respond, I... because I will naturally think in Chinese first, and I can't change my way of thinking fast enough, so... usually I would end the conversation quickly and give others no chance to say more," said Erin, laughing out loud.

More challenges came with the beginning of first semester. Erin was not used to expressing her opinions in class, and it was harder using English to make arguments. She also had to deal with the problems of various accents, for students in her program came from different countries. "I'll pretend I understand," said Erin, laughing out loud, "but sometimes I would be seen through." "There will be two possible scenarios," Erin further explained, "One is that the person would say 'Oh, no, I meant...' and I am like 'Am I an idiot? Was I really listening?' The other is that I responded something irrelevant during the conversation, and the person would ask the question again, and I would give an irrelevant answer again, and about three times we would drop the topic and move on."

Erin avoided the difficulties once by skipping class, but she pulled herself up quickly and consciously changed her study habits. Being anxious about what to say in class though, she tried to seize the chance to express her opinions in group discussions. She got an A in her last assignment, which she had thought she would never have a chance to see in her paper. Finally, she accomplished 1,5000-word dissertation in English. As Erin contented, she was a goal-oriented person, and she was fully aware of the fact that she came to the U.K. to study and to learn, not "for fun."

Speaking of English the language, Erin stated that she never felt that she was learning English when studying in the U.K.; English was simply a medium for her to

develop her expertise and attain the degree. Erin also provided her view of language learning:

I don't think language should be learned in the way we learn it in Taiwan. [...] It's strange that we learn to write [the alphabet] first then learn to read, and maybe we would never learn to speak [English] because speaking could not be tested. So, I study it [English] just for tests, and English actually has no use in my daily life. Then, why would I have to learn it? [...] If I learn something just for tests, and the thing I need to learn means nothing to my life, and I'm not interested in it at all, why would I do that?

Another change Erin went through is that she was aware of the fact that language is a way of thinking. She used to think that translating sentences was far easier than writing an English essay, but now she considered translation "the hardest thing in the world." She took her experience of writing a consent form for example: "I typed it up in English first, and it took me ten minutes or so. But I also needed to translate it into Chinese [for my Chinese participant], and it took me a long time. [...] If I had only needed to type it up in Chinese, I could also do it very fast, but it would be very difficult if I also needed to translate it into English."

Finishing the study in the U.K., Erin came back to Taiwan and found herself a job as a full-time research assistant. She also started to teach English in a small-scaled language center. All in all, English now shows up in many aspects of her career.



## Chapter 5 Discussion

The previous chapter has already addressed Research Questions 1 and 2, detailing Erin's experiences before, during, and after her graduate study in the U.K. This chapter mainly addresses Research Question 3, "***What is the role that agency plays in Erin's learning process, and how does she exercise learner agency to cope with the challenges and various scenarios in the different learning contexts:***

***Taiwan and the U.K.?***" The core features of learner agency proposed by van Lier was adopted as the analytic framework.

As reviewed earlier, van Lier (2008) proposed three features of learner agency: "(1) Agency involves initiative or self-regulation by the learner; (2) Agency is interdependent, that is, it mediates and is mediated by the sociocultural context; (3) Agency includes an awareness of the responsibility for one's own actions vis-à-vis the environment, including affected others" (p.172). van Lier's theoretical proposal of learner agency was in many aspects consistent with my observation of Erin's story. First, her initiative and self-regulation are clear in the story. Despite having many challenges to deal with, in Erin's learning experiences, it is noted that she always takes initiatives and exercise her agency, whether performing or rejecting the action that she was expected to take. van Lier (2010) specifically pinpointed that agency is "movement, a change of state or direction, or even a lack of movement where movement is expected" (p. 4). This changing movement is observed, first of all, in Erin's negative attitude toward Taiwanese English educational system embodied by real action such as deliberately skipping classes. Then, during the time preparing the college entrance exam, Erin again decided to stop making any investment on English

and turned to make more efforts on her other interest, that is History, and she indeed became a History major in college. This shows that Erin is indeed an agentive learner who is goal-oriented and willing to take initiative as she is well aware of how to spend her time in her best interest even though she did not seem to have the movement expected by her teachers or parents. This finding corresponds to Chang's (2011) case study on two nonnative English-speaking (NNES) doctoral students. Chang's (2011) participants' investment in language learning was driven by several practical considerations, including strengthening different kinds of disciplinary competence. The author concluded that regardless of various challenges the NNES needed to face, the learner was able to exercise their agency to choose where and how they made investments. This statement is also true with Erin's case.

Erin's story and the first feature of van Lier's perception of learner agency remind TESOL practitioners that "a lack of motivation" or "a lack of movement" needs to be taken as a revelation of learner agency. TESOL practitioners generally have the mindset that learners' willingness to learn or their motivation is a binary system; that is, the learner either *has* or *do not have* the motivation to learn. However, with van Lier's frame of learner agency, learners' willingness to learn has to be taken as a continuum, and learners' performance is the product of their exercise of agency, whether or not they decide to learn.

van Lier's second feature of learner agency is that agency is "interdependent": the learner's exert of agency is profoundly associated with the ideology and the rooted culture of the wider sociocultural context. This is also obvious in Erin's experiences. For example, in Erin's story, it has been noted that her teachers as representative of

the sociocultural context that Erin engaged in played critical roles all along, and her perceptions of the teachers were the key to the success of some school subjects, such as History and Geography. Indeed, in Taiwan, with the tradition of Confucianism, teachers are fairly important in the learning process. Many learners believe that “teachers can never be wrong” and are taught to fully respect teachers. Under such circumstances, teachers can be ‘idols’ to some learners, as those in the popular culture, and the learner would try their best to seek teachers’ approval. Erin is no exception. In fact, her desire to get approval from her teachers appears to be especially strong. Thus, once when Erin perceived that she was not favored by her English teacher, her level of willingness to learn lowered, whether or not the teacher actually showed negative attitude toward Erin’s performance. Deep in her heart she thought being a low-achiever deserved more attention from the teacher, but in reality, she could only feel contempt.

The concept of learner agency and context interdependence shifted as Erin moved to the informal learning and work context. Ever since Erin graduated from high school, she no longer considered English as a subject to study but a tool to explore different worlds. She started to immerse herself in multiple foreign language environments, including indulging herself in American/British TV series, working as a teaching assistant (TA) in an English-only language institute, and finally studying abroad. Not only did Erin change her perceptions of English but she viewed her identity differently: She did not regard herself as an English learner but an English user.

Working in the English-only language institute is another instance of learner agency and context interdependence that Erin's story demonstrated. Erin often needed to negotiate with many international teachers in her work. She also hung out with international teachers and became friends with them. These experiences offered Erin opportunities to speak and to listen, transferring what she acquired from TV series, an imagined community, to real life. Fully engaged in a foreign language environment, Erin finally was able to break away from the limitations of the formal institutionalized English learning system and gradually reconnected her relationship with English.

The third feature of van Lier's learner agency led this researcher to focus on Erin's awareness of responsibility. While studying abroad, Erin had difficulty adapting to the learning environment in the first place. She skipped classes to avoid embarrassment first, but she was aware of her responsibility for her action and put herself together quickly, as she stated in interviews that she did not go abroad "for fun" but to study. She knew she needed to finish the reading materials however hard they were and to be brave about speaking up in class despite feeling anxious. These experiences indicate that she was aware, and the third feature of van Lier's theoretical proposal of learner agency applies.

All in all, Erin's story makes van Lier's features of learner agency concrete in the Taiwanese context. From these concrete instances, two assertions can be derived: (1) Being an EFL learner in the formal educational context may encounter many challenges but the learner still has room to exercise his or her agency—even if this could mean avoiding or rejecting learning the language, and (2) Fully engaged in a foreign language environment, the learner is likely to break away from the limitations

of formal English learning system, and (3) become aware of their responsibility. Assertion 1 provides a solid support to van Lier's claim that the learner is still exercising their agency even when they refuse to perform the action they are expected to take. Also, learners will take initiative to decide where to invest their time and efforts on. Assertion 2 can be considered corresponding to van Lier's features 2. That is, the concepts of interdependence between the learner and context can be clearly illustrated by Erin's indulging in formal and informal language acquisition environments. Assertion 3 is consistent with van Lier's features 3 that Erin was fully aware of her own responsibility for her own learning as she tried out various learning strategies in different contexts.

To conclude, this chapter provides an in-depth discussion on the implication of Erin's story using van Lier's features of language learner agency as the framework. Taiwan is a limited context for EFL learners, but learners in Taiwan do have access to many learning resources. Erin's language learning story prompts us to think what the language means to Taiwanese EFL learners as to her ways of exerting her agency was documented and analyzed in this study. As mentioned earlier, most Taiwanese learners are exposed to English learning at a young age, Erin herself included. Nevertheless, in the interviews, Erin clearly stated that in Taiwan her willingness to speak English was low, especially in the English class at school. Studying in the middle school, Erin barely wanted to speak English, while in the U.K., she actually enjoyed speaking English to people she did not even know. Such a contrast requires teachers and researchers to consider the core differences between the two contexts, especially in terms of the role English the language plays for Taiwanese learners. It is

the researchers' hope that this study has provided a possible way to engage in such a consideration.



## Chapter 6 Conclusion

### The End of the Research Journey

#### A Revisit to Erin's Exercise of Learner Agency

Erin's story provides a vivid picture of how a Taiwanese EFL learner agentively exerted her learner agency in various learning contexts. Under formal education, English is typically considered merely a subject to study. Not seeing the value of daily memorization of many vocabulary words and tests, Erin decisively rejected English learning. When she broke away from the formal educational system in the U.K. and at work, the role of English changed—English became a medium to understand American culture, particularly through such media as TV shows and songs. Erin actively indulged herself in the world of American TV shows, which helped her pick up the actual usage and enhance her confidence in English. While Erin was studying abroad, the role of English changed again—it became a medium to study her profession. English was no longer a subject to study but the medium that helped her to study. She was actually using the language to understand a new world.

The insight gained from the research was that each individual learner needs to be viewed as an active agent who has great control of his or her own learning process, whether to accept or reject English learning. Engaged in different sociocultural contexts, the learner's exercise of agency may vary to a large extent. Learners in Taiwan do have access to immerse themselves in foreign language contexts, i.e. English TV shows or songs; however, what TESOL practitioners can do to involve

learners in the contexts and whether they are willing to invest a large amount of time and effort on these resources are the real challenges.

### Pedagogical Implications

Erin's story implies how a Taiwanese learner conceptualizes English learning in 3 different levels: learn the language, use the language, and use the language to learn. Situated in the test-oriented educational context, Erin conceptualized English learning only for taking tests. She resisted learning the language because she could not see the value. Working as a TA, however, Erin was using the language to achieve the purpose of communication, where she started to realize the practical value of learning the language. Studying abroad, Erin was using the language as a medium to develop her expertise, and she no longer considered herself "learning the language."

Erin's experiences remind TESOL practitioners that giving learners real purposes to learn and creating opportunities for learners to use the language are vital to enhance learner agency. If learners have a chance to use the language they learned to achieve communicative purposes or to accomplish real tasks, their willingness to learn is likely to be promoted since they can see the value of learning the language.

### Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

#### *Limitations*

The present research was limited by two aspects: the lack of observation while Erin was studying in the U.K. and the intimate relationship the researcher has with the



participant. For the first limitation, apart from the first and the final interview, most interviews were conducted while Erin was studying abroad. The interviews targeted at both Erin's past and current experiences as an international student. Since I grew up with Erin, I could picture the struggles she had while studying in the middle school. I also witnessed her improvement and the changing relationship she had with English in college. Therefore, it is not that difficult for me to grasp her emotions when she recalled her past learning experiences and discussed her struggles or conflict deeply. However, for her study abroad experiences, I could only have interviews with her; it was not possible to conduct observations. It would be better if I had a chance to follow her for some time in the U.K. so that I could better understand her life there. Fortunately, with the widespread use of Facebook, Erin's postings of pictures helped me to picture the event she participated in or the interaction she had with her international friends.

The second limitation is regarding the relationship I have with the participant. Erin and I are good friends. With such a good rapport, I had her trust. She felt comfortable to talk to me, and the trustworthiness of the data gathered during the interview was enhanced as well. However, on the other hand, I was likely to be blinded in some aspects, which is the limitation that I cannot avoid in the present study.

### *Suggestions for future research*

It is a fruitful research effort to track a language learner's learning experiences in various contexts in a long run. The present study reveals the changing relationship a

language learner has with English, delineating the struggles and accomplishments while the learner interacts with the language in different contexts. It is suggested that researchers can further explore language learners' long-term learning experiences to gain a deeper understanding about how they exercise their agency when dealing with challenges or scenarios in different contexts.

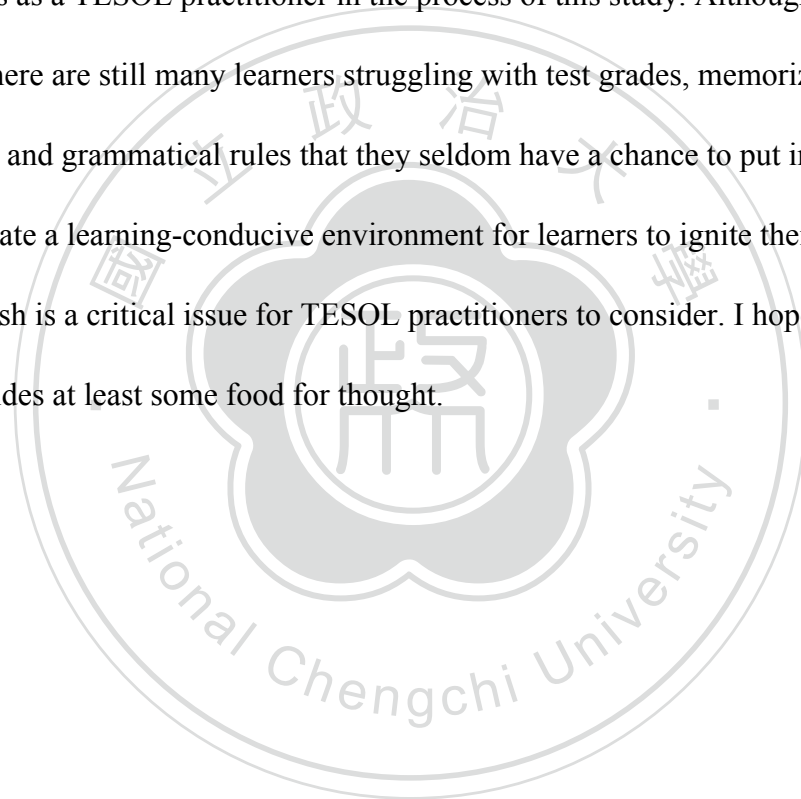
Another suggestion for researchers who are interested in the topic of study abroad is to use Facebook postings as a way for data collection. As mentioned earlier, one of the limitations of the present study is that I could not shadow my informant while she was studying in the U.K., so sometimes it is difficult for me to picture the event she described. Erin's Facebook postings help me to picture the scenes and understand her emotions at the moment more precisely, which allows further discussions in the upcoming interviews.

#### Final Remark

I would like to use Meskill's (2013) comments on sociocultural perspective of learning to conclude this research journey:

The [sociocultural] perspective is in direct contrast to views of human motivations and learning that are strictly cognitivist, or *in the head*. Rather, sociocultural perspectives see development as *in the world* phenomena and thus attempt to account for larger historical, contextual elements that shape our mediations with the world and with others. (p 2., emphasis in original)

Meskill's words remind us that learning is a complex process that a large number of elements are required to take into consideration. From Erin's story, we saw a long and struggling process of English learning and a complicated relationship a learner might have with English, the language. I feel resonated a lot with her story since we share similar challenges and experiences, while I also reflect on my own teaching experiences as a TESOL practitioner in the process of this study. Although time has changed, there are still many learners struggling with test grades, memorizing vocabulary and grammatical rules that they seldom have a chance to put into practice. How to create a learning-conducive environment for learners to ignite their agency to learn English is a critical issue for TESOL practitioners to consider. I hope that this study provides at least some food for thought.



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## APPENDIX

## Interview Transcript:

## First Narrative Interview on Erin's English Learning Process

R: 今天是八月二十五號晚上九點，第一次的訪談。現在我們要請 Erin 說說看她學習英文的故事。

E: 蛤，喔。就是小時候、我對英文的映象應該是就是國小嘛，就是好像三、四年級的，就是小時候沒有補過英文，然後三、四年級的時候就好像國小有那個英文課，就是美語課，好像一個禮拜兩堂這樣子，然後那個時候就還滿快樂的，就是可能就是一些就是課本上面都是什麼外星人的故事啊，然後什麼。就好像、我記得就好像是一個外星人然後來地球，然後大家要跟他作朋友什麼之類的，然後就用英文講，然後那時候也沒有什麼特別排斥或喜歡，就是覺得，有拉那時候還滿喜歡，就覺得還滿好玩的。然後每個、每個禮拜就是去、每個禮拜就去上兩次課這樣，然後那個英文老師人也還滿 nice 的我覺得，對，那個時候，對。然後後來...

R: 所以是補習班嗎？

E: 不是，是國小、小學裡面的。然後後來就是國中...(長停頓)...就國中之後就...國中國一開始就比較、很討厭英文(笑)因為國小也沒有就是要你要背啊或什麼的，就是好像是每個禮拜就上課然後就是玩那樣的感覺，對，然後國中就開始一直逼你要背英文，然後就、我記得那時候一課好像有十幾個、二十幾個單字，然後就要一直背，然後好像欸有雜誌嗎？好像我也忘了，反正就是很、因為我不是一個很喜歡背誦的人，因為我自己覺得就是如果是中文的，像是歷史地理或國文這種東西其實我自己比較擅長的語言的話我背誦其實還滿快的，我不太需要回家花時間去背，可是英文就是一定要回家、就是要回家背，可是我就是很懶得(笑)背誦的人，對，所以我其實那時候英文也沒有特別，就是算是比較中、在班上應該算是中下的程度，也就沒有特別好，然後那時候就開始比較討厭英文，就覺得很煩，然後就是要一直背啊，然後還有文法什麼，然後都聽不懂老師在講什麼。其實我覺得是一開始就排斥之後你也不會想要認真聽，然後你不認真聽就自然而然就是會越來越爛、越來越爛這樣。然後後來...國二是同一個老師嗎？好像有換對不對？(IC: R 與 E 是國中同學)

R: 我也忘了

E：反正就，對，反正我非常討厭國一的那個英文老師（大笑），然後、對。然後後來好像有換到，我忘了是什麼時候，反正有換到一個人比較好的老師，就是一個老老的老師，然後他就是對我們還滿好的啊，上課都會講一些他出國的事，然後那時候就有對英文比較有一點點興趣，就覺得，歐就是國外就是好像會有一個憧憬這樣子，對。因為我從小就還滿喜歡看書的，所以就是也可能會看到國外一些就是翻譯的文學，所以就是大概會想像一些國外的生活什麼的，對。然後高中就整個（停頓）對，欸我...國三的時候不是要考基測嗎，然後就要考英文嘛，然後那時候因為我一輩子也沒有請過家教，但是之前是一直有、國中之後就一直有在補習班補英文，就我那時候是補全科，就國語數學、欸沒有補國語拉英文數學理化都有補。

R：是從什麼時候開始？國三嗎？

E：沒有，那個補習是從我小六就有去上先修、就小六暑假就有去國一先修班，然後就上，可是

R：就是全科了？

E：對對對，可是我、我後來發現那個英文老師（笑）英文不太好（大笑），對，這是後話，對可是就是反正就也是每天在那邊聽啊，然後也沒有、也沒有什麼激起什麼興趣啊，反正就是那樣，對。後來是國三，就是國、國三是考基測嘛，我們那時候是兩次基測，然後第一次基測考完就成績沒有太理想，對，好像就還好而已就沒有很高分，然後後來就是那時候剛好有認識一個就是那時候社團的人，然後他那時候好像是大學生吧，然後他英文也就還不錯，就潘姐（小聲，笑）（IC：潘姐是 R 與 E 共同認識的人），然後就來我家就是幫我上家教這樣子，對。然後那也就是上了一個多月吧，就是第一次跟第二次基測期間，對，然後因為我非常喜歡那個家教，所以後來就是因為我好像只錯三題，我那時候好像是 53 分，就滿分 60 我拿 53 分，就算是還不錯的成績吧我想。然後那時候有去考初級英檢，結果沒有考過（笑），合理的，對啊就是、就是那時候真的英文沒有特別好，然後也沒有、就是有一點點排斥可是真的也不會到很（加重語氣）啊，對，可是我真正

R：國中的時候？

E：嗯，我真正恨英文是從高中，就真的非常痛恨英文（笑）。因為我覺得、其實高中跟國中英文雖然說是接上去上，可是還是有一些還滿大的差異吧我想，就是那些字的難度啊或是、因為可能高中老師都會覺得「啊反正你國中都學過，你應該要會，這些很簡單、你應該要會」，就可能就只是要你背一些比較難的單字而已，他可能你需要付出的就只有要背單字，因為那些文法你國中就上過了，你應該要會。但是，我們國中就是沒有學好啊（笑），對。然後、高一、然後我高一的時候也不太順啦，就是那時候有就是不太喜歡上學、逃學症之類的，所以也、那時候其實所有科目都不好，對。我國中的時候成績算還滿不錯的，就是我們那時候能力分班都可以分到 A+班，就是算前段，雖然英文不好但是平均起來是可以到前段，可是高中就真的一直掉，掉到倒數的，我高一開始是倒數兩、三名，一、兩名這樣在掉，對。然後後來高二又重新分組嘛，就選社會組還是自然組，然後因為我後來覺得自己數學沒有特別好，因為高中數學真的太難，然後我就選擇社會組，因為還滿喜歡歷史，就文科，歷史地理。然後後來，可能因為是文組所以英文老師就特別的要求，然後因為我們那時候的、我們班的英文老師是那個、我們學校的英文資優班的導師，對，然後他自己、我覺得他自己是很順利的吧，在學英文的路上，他就是、好像就是讀師大附中啊，然後欸北一女的樣子，然後就考上師大英文系，然後就出國去美國留學回來，然後就找到我們學校的工作。因為我覺得他是一個學英文很順利的人，所以他可能也沒有辦法理解我們的想法，對啊，然後高中就更可怕啊，高中的課文、課本的單字，然後課文的文法，然後還要寫習作，每天還要有那個英文雜誌，然後高二開始要背四千單，然後我就覺得（笑）、因為我那時候真的很恨英文，我就覺得，你是覺得我就全部、就全部的人生就只有英文嗎？我不用準備別科嗎？你到底憑什麼丟那麼多東西給我？

（口氣激動）因為每一天都要念英文雜誌就是唸個一兩頁，但我英文真的不好，而且高一又整個荒廢掉，所以，對我來、可能對別人來說他可能花個五到十分鐘就 OK，但對我來說可能要花半個小時甚至一個小時才能看完，那我就自己、自然就不會想啊，反正就惡性循環吧，我想，對。然後後來高、高二下，其實那時候其實我是對、因為歷史地理就變得比較好，然後就有比較認真讀那幾科，但是我英文是完全放棄。我那時候真的是數學比英文好，對，然後我就是完全就不理英文喔，每天就是、那時候我們老師、因為那時候其實就很明確知道我不是考學測的人

R：你是說高三的時候完全放棄讀英文嗎？

E：我高二的時候就

R：還是高二的時候？

E：（我高二的時候就）已經放棄了，對，因為我真的很討厭。我覺得那老師，他、而且他的態度也不是很...好，我覺得，他可能就覺得我沒救了吧，所以他也不想花費時間在我身上（笑），對。然後反正後來高三，就高二下就對歷史地理比較有興趣之後，我就開始有認真讀書，但是我真的就是完全不想碰英文，我那時候因為學測是歷史地理三科公民嘛，三科合一科，所以我自己覺得我自己是沒有辦法靠學測拿到好的學校，所以我那時候就很明確的知道我其實是要考指考，因為指考是我的強項分數是分科的，對，然後我一直、就我、我那時候考完之後，沒有，要先講考之前。我考之前念那個書啊，可以每天寫一百多題的歷史，我們老師那時候買了，就是一回是三百題的歷史，我可以一天寫一回欸，我可以一天寫三百題耶，可是我就完全不碰英文，我連背都不想背，我連打開它都不願意打開，對。然後，反正當然拉，我的歷史地理後來就考很高分，可是、我忘記分數了，但是我唯一就是記得我英文只考十八分（大笑），就滿分一百分的指考英文，就是加上倒扣什麼的，我只考了十八分，因為我根本也沒有能力把、而且我也不願意、不想去把題目看完，我就直接猜，所以十八分我覺得是還滿合理的啦。然後後來就也是因為別科滿高分的，所以就上東吳大學，就還不錯的學校，對。然後就當、我覺得我英文變好是從、就是升大學的那個暑假，因為那個暑假、七月一二、七月二號考完以後就都沒有什麼事情可以做，然後那時候就開始看影集。那時候我是轉電視是轉到 CSI，然後就有看，然後看到後來就開始自己跟朋友啊就聊天，然後他們也會聊說有什麼影集好看，然後就開始看影集。那因為影集其實都是大陸來的，網路上的影集，對，所以其實也就是翻譯不太好啦。然後我覺得看影集其實就是聽力就會提升嘛，然後同時我也去、會去找一些外國的，就是英文歌來聽，然後英文歌的話我就會去查那個歌詞、會去 download 那個歌詞下來，然後可能去查那個歌詞的意思吧什麼的，然後跟著唱，然後就有...我那時候也不覺得我英文有變好，但我覺得應該是那時候就聽力變好然後慢慢就是拉上來，對。然後那個...對。還有什麼...然後、然後文、文法，然後我要講一個很好笑的事情，就是那時候在看那個影集，然後我覺得也是因為大陸的翻譯實在太爛了，對，中國的翻譯太爛，那時候就是我很印象超深刻的，他那時候好像說，那個人要被救，他的氧氣不足、他體內的氧氣不足，然後結果那個醫生就寫、就叫那個護、旁邊的助手還護士就說教他給他一氧化氮，就是 NO，然後就是、然後結果那個翻譯居然寫說他說 NO now，就是現在給那個人那個一氧化氮，但是他翻譯居然寫「不，現在！」（笑）然後我就覺得滿誇張的，對。就從那時候開始我就覺得，恩，好像不能完全聽信他的翻譯（笑），對然後開始就是，欸他好像翻得怪怪的時候我就會特別注意這樣子，對。然後後來因為大...二，升大三那年我想要轉系，但是因為反正我自己、我覺得是我自己的問題，我沒有提前跟我父母討



論這件事情，所以他們那時候是不願意幫我簽那個轉系申請書，那我就自己去補了轉學考，因為我覺得那我就去考轉學考這樣子。然後...就剛好有報了英文，對，那時候就報了統計跟英文，然後我覺得那個英文老師其實上得還不錯，可能大概轉學考的那些會去補轉學考的人大概就是、他大概就是知道他們英文就是不太好吧，所以他就是用很簡單的方法講文法，所以我覺得其實我的文法是從那時候就是補英文然後慢慢的補回來一點，可能自己就是大腦也發展的比較好一點了，比較能夠理解他在講什麼，對。那當然他帶的題目啊什麼的也都還滿容易理解的，所以我那時候、那時候就覺得我的文法有好一點，對。然後後來因為我們大學時候的英文分級是按照指考的分數，所以當然想當然爾我就被分到了就是初級班，對，那可是對，後來就是因為我覺得因為以上剛剛講得那些，就是我的英文程度是跟所有初級班同學比起來是比較好的，對，然後就上完還滿順利的就通過就是大一大二那個英文，然後通過之後就考我們那時候有一個英檢，然後那個英檢是那個畢業門檻之一，那時候其實還滿擔心我會考不過的，可是就還滿順利的就一次就考過了，所以我後來也都沒有再去修英文或什麼的。然後因為其實，因為後來我就成功、反正後來我又轉成了心理系，又再隔一年又申請，然後還是轉到心理系去，那心理系其實就還滿多就是英文的書，就課本大部分都是英文、原文書，然後老師也都是從國外留學回來，大部分拉，然後那時候也就滿多人、就心理系還滿多人就流行出國這件事情，對，然後就開始想說「欸可能可以出國去」這樣。然後

R：所以是從大三開始就有想？

E：沒有欸好像大二，因為、因為其實我大二是讀了兩次，就是我一年級是在歷史系，就原本的系，然後二年級還是在歷史系，但是那時候我已經開始準備轉系了，所以我修了很多他們心理系的課，因為我就想說現在先修之後去就不會那麼辛苦，所以我那時候就上他們的普通心理學啊還是生理學那些，就是我只要課是錯開的我就去修，對。我甚至還去修了微積分（笑），然後，對。然後後來，就是再、因為我後來大二升大三轉過去成功之後他是變成、因為我們是不同學院所以他就是要降一級，所以我大二又讀了一次，對，所以我大學總共讀了五年。那其實就是等於算正常人的大三那一年，但其實我是大二，對，然後就考慮說「其實可以出國，那那時候就去找托、因為那時候其實大部分的老師還是去美國，對，然後就找托福的補習班啊什麼的，就問，然後有一些同學也要出國然後就有跟他們討論，然後他們又介紹補習班什麼的，對。然後好像是大...四吧，就是我的大三拉，正常人的大四那一年，就去補托福，對，然後其實托福真的非常的難（笑），然後字也就是很難啊，所以其實我那時候也是有一搭沒一搭的在補，我也沒有真

的認真的美一堂課都去上，對，然後後來補完之後、因為他是反正就是要再考一次才能去上，然後我就又去考沒有考過、就沒有考到要得到的分數，因為心理系美國大概要 100，就托福電腦測驗要 100 分，就是很難，然後反正就、就去、就回去再去補，那這次再回去補就有比較認真一點，可是，對，結論就是我還是考了同一個分數，完全不知道我那半年是為了什麼（笑）。對，然後後來就想說先休息，因為、因為就是要畢業了嘛，我想說反正也沒有考到，然後也來不及申請學校，就想要先休息，因為我覺得短時間再一直去考也沒什麼意義啊，可能考出來成績也差不多，那一次又要考、考很、就是六、六七千塊我覺得很貴，對，我就想說先休息，然後剛好那時候、五月的時候就有就是台大有在找助理，然後我就去應徵，然後就上了，然後後來也、反正也是經過一段辛苦，然後就覺得那工作好像不太適合我，所以就離職，對。然後離職之後，因為我之前大三的時候有去就是英文補習班就當過那個助教，就是外師在上課然後我在、我在旁邊改作業啊、管小朋友。那那個就是上課的過程中就是全英文的環境，就是你也不可以跟小朋友講中文，就是你可能要用很簡易的英文跟他說不可以怎樣或要做什麼，不然就是你、他真的沒有辦法控制的話你就把他拉到門外才能講中文。對那英文老師也是就是外國人，所以那時候其實跟同事溝通啊還有跟小朋友溝通，我覺得我的口說是那時候練起來的，對。然後，就也是因為這個經驗啊，然後我還滿順利的就找到、就是另外一家補習班，就是去做兼職的老師，對。然後就去教英文，就還滿神秘的，我後來、我高中英文老師發現我在教英文他就覺得、我在想他可能覺得我怎麼可以去誤人子弟吧！他說、他說你怎麼這麼厲害這樣（笑），對啊。然後就教英文，然後因為其實後來教的兒美什麼的都是小朋友很小，就是小一小二，所以那個英文其實是很簡單的，對，就什麼 How are you、What's your name? 之類的。然後遇到一個高中的學生是他也很討厭英文，所以他也不喜歡啊，然後他們的、因為他是高職，所以他們的教材其實是算是國二、國三的，所以也沒有很難，對，那因為我會比較想講的是我對那個高中生的、的教學方式，因為，我覺得

R：是家教嗎？高中生這個是家教嗎？

E：嗯就是一對一，不是家教，這是去補習班但是是一對一，對。那因為我、我覺得看到他就好像看到以前的我，對。因為他就跟我、就是說他就很討厭英文，然後就跟他聊，然後就發現欸他也是、就是國中老師很討厭，他非常討厭他國中的英文老師，他就說什麼「你知道老師多大小眼嗎？」什麼什麼的，他就說這種、我們這種英文爛的他就把我們丟在後面，然後就一直叫我們抄課文，然後這種很沒意義的抄寫、你叫我們抄單字我還可以接受，我可能背，但他就覺得你為什麼

要逼我背課文什麼的，反正他就會跟我抱怨這些事情。對，其實我會覺得就是我會比較想用活潑的方式帶他啦，對。所以我後來就有去找一些英文歌啊什麼的，但是後來結論就是沒有奏效，就是（笑）對，可是就是我會就是、我就不想要再給這個孩子壓力，對我就會覺得因為他媽媽就會一直希望他去考英檢或什麼的，可是我就覺得就是他已經這麼討厭英文，我覺得主要是要先燃起他對英文的興趣，因為我自己很明確、我自己的個案就是這樣，就是你討厭就是學不好，你有興趣了，那慢慢的可能還可以慢慢的、你有興趣之後可能會慢慢變好，但如果你沒有興趣你根本就不想碰他，你就不可能會變好。所以後來我可能就是、因為我們是一個禮拜兩個小時的課，那我就會，ㄟ跟他稍微講一下英文啊、然後叫他背一下單字，然後他就忽然會想說欸今天發生什麼事他就跟我講一講，我說好，就是給他講個一兩句之後再帶回課文，對，就是不會一直逼他，對，因為我覺得這樣真的很可憐。然後就是在這個同時我開始就是、其實我本來中途也自己不知道要幹嘛拉，就是從台大離職之後，然後就去補習班啊，然後就、反正就渾渾噩噩的，我也不知道、每天都睡到下午，因為晚上才上班（笑），對，然後也不知道要幹嘛，然後那時候就想說欸那開補習班啊什麼的，反正就天馬行空胡亂想，然後後來是我同、有一個大學同學然後他剛好從韓國回來，然後他就跟我說，喔我那時候跟他說我想去 **working holiday**，去澳洲或紐西蘭，然後他就說、他就非常不屑的跟我說了一句話，他說「齁我這一輩子沒看過你動過，你怎麼可能去」（笑）就是去、因為可能 **working holiday** 就是比較勞力的工作，對，那他覺得我不太適合，對，所以他就說那你乾脆為什麼不去唸書，你唸書至少還會一年之後拿一個文憑回來，對，然後後來又就聽一聽然後想好像也對，然後就想說好吧，然後就因為我剛好大四、大三升大四那年剛好我朋友、有一個朋友他要去英國，然後就有介紹我他的代辦，然後我就去找那個代辦，然後就開始準備

R：所以是畢業一年之後才開始去找代辦嗎？還是？

E：我畢業前一年，因為我的、我大三的時候跟我同年齡的朋友都已經大四了，然後他們就剛好有個朋友他剛好去英國，然後那時候他就帶我去找他的代辦，我那時候本來就要順便一起準備了，因為我只比他晚一年而已，但後來就沒有去成，對。然後就畢業一年之後，隔、就是畢業一年，還不到一年拉，因為去年六月畢業嘛，然後我今年三月的時候去找、又再打電話給那個代辦，然後他就跟我說還是要準備什麼什麼東西，然後我們就去挑學校啊、挑系，然後就四月初就反正很趕，然後把東西都送出去，然後還滿快一個禮拜就拿到 **offer**，然後就開始考雅斯。然後因為雅斯跟托福比起來，雅斯真的比較簡單，因為托福可能他要考你邏輯推理之類的，對，然後他的又很制式化，可能他的 **speaking** 就是對著機器



講啊，然後就會被錄音，然後、我覺得那個感覺就不太一樣，然後那時候我同學就跟我講、就去英國那個同學，他考過雅斯，他就跟我說你要習慣跟外國人講話，雅斯的口說是跟就考官直接講，就一對一直接講英文，他會問你，然後你就直接講這樣，可是我那時候是覺得我可能不太擔心我口說的部份，因為畢竟我之前都有跟我那些外國人同事聊天或什麼的，我覺得是還好，對。然後反正我那時候好像四月中拿到 offer，然後我就報了五月中的一場，然後就去考，那考完之後、反正那時候就覺得我 speaking 亂講，然後就覺得還滿焦慮，反正就趕快又報了六月初的一場，幸好我報了那一場，因為我後來是寫作沒有過，然後其實那時候真的很擔心，因為我學校是他說平均要 6.5，然後每一科要有 6，但是如果就是這是你入學的成績，可是如果就是說你考到、他好像那時候是說是考每一科有 5.5，然後平均有 6 的話你就可以去唸十週的那個 presectional，然後我那時候就是差一科，我寫作只有 5，然後那時候我代辦就寄信問學校說欸那他差一科可不可以讓他也去上十週的 presectional，然後結果學校就回他說，他這樣的、就說我這樣的成績是要念 21 週的 presectional，那已經從四月七號就開始上了，然後他就說 Obviously, it's too late! (笑) 然後我就很想揍那個人，對 (笑) 然後就覺得什麼，對你可以婉轉一點嗎？這樣。然後反正那時候就很、那時候就真的超級焦慮 (放慢加重)，因為我那時候就有問我代辦，我說就那這樣子的話我是不是就算考到 6 分，平、每一科都有 5.5 是不是還是不能去，因為我六月七號考嘛，然後他好像要 14 天，所以我六月二十才能拿到成績，但是十週的那個 presectional 六月二十三號就開始上了，所以我就說是不是這樣會來不及，因為還要辦簽證啊什麼機票那些，他說對，所以你就考更好，然後我就覺得天哪！這真是 (笑) 我都已經沒辦法通過這個了，然後你還叫我考更好，而且其實因為我四月中拿到 offer 我沒有直接去補雅斯，因為我只剩下兩三週我就要考了，沒有那種兩三週密集的課程，而且我又覺得就是會很貴，所以我就、我就想說反正之前都已經去補過托福了，然後我又覺得雅斯其實、因為我同學有跟我說嘛，其實並沒有托福那麼難，對，所以我就自己去找了那個劍橋雅斯的那個模擬考題來寫，然後寫、大概就是 6 啦，我那時候算一算就是寫、閱讀跟聽力就是 6，然後我就覺得不可能有 6，那就是喔我第一次雅斯的成績閱讀是 7 分，你要抄一下嗎？閱讀是 7 分，然後聽力好像、聽力好像是 6.5，然後

R：你是說做 sample test 的時候嗎？

E：不是，這是第一次正式的成績，對，因為那個模考他不會給你分數，他只會給你大概會落在哪一段，然後寫作就是不到，就是 5 分而已，就 5.0，然後口說是 5.5，所以其實我那一次是口說有到，但是是寫作不夠，對。然後

R：speaking 是 5.5?

E：對，然後後來就、那時候就超焦慮，我就「好吧，算了」就是如果我六月七號考完再不過就算了，就是可能隔年再去或什麼的。可是其實我隔年再去又卡在因為其實我是還滿想要、因為我出國是念那個 counseling 就是諮商，那我還滿想要可以回來之後就是、我希望回國可以考心理師的執照，但是反正他們因為今年改制，所以如果我不是今年出去明年回來的話，我再晚一年、明年再出去後年回來我就一定沒有辦法考心理師的執照，對。所以就是還是希望可以今年就出去，所以我六月七號那一次去考，其實我覺得雅斯運氣真的很重要，但當然中間我就知道我的弱點在那個寫作了嘛，那我就有特別練習了寫作，練習了兩三篇這樣，因為我之前是完全沒有練習寫，對。那這一次就還滿幸運的，我就直接考到了，就平均要 6.5 每一科要有 6 的成績，所以就是可以直接不用唸 presectional 就直接去這樣，大概是這樣。那你還要問什麼嗎？

R：那你唸、你對於要出國唸書這件事情有什麼想法？

E：其實我（猶豫、停頓）

R：從一開始的想要到你真的在準備到你現在即將要去，你有些什麼期望，或者你對於這整件事「出國唸書」這件事情你有什麼、有什麼想法？

E：其實...嗯...我覺得在準備雅斯的時候、就是在等 offer 的時候跟在準備雅斯那段時間到考完拿到成績是最緊張跟焦慮的時候，就是會很害怕就是到底去不去得成什麼，其實那時候就是很擔心去不成，然後因為、我、我要的那個學校是我很想要的學校（強調），對，所以我又覺得我就一定要去，因為其實我那時候有拿到別的學校的 offer，那我也是可以去的，但是我就不想去那間學校，我想要去就是這個 6.5 分的這個學校，所以那時候就還滿焦慮，就想說到底要不要屈就於排名往下一點的學校這樣，對啊。反正後來就是還滿、因為那時候就很擔心、就很焦慮，其實也沒有特別想說之後要怎麼樣，就真的拿到 offer 然後開始去買機票啊辦簽證啊弄這些的，其實因為我後來七八月、八月變得超級忙，就是很多事情就是可能因為之前的工作啊什麼的都還沒有結束，然後還要家裡有一些事情去幫忙，所以根本就沒有時間去想說要出國了這件事，就是可能就是「喔，好，我現在要來辦簽證了，我就要趕快去辦簽證。學校要申請宿舍就要趕快去申請宿舍」就是，真的就是按部就班的把事情做完，就是沒有什麼時間去感受，對啊（笑）。

然後，是最近吧，這兩個禮拜有比較稍微把事情都處理得差不多，對，然後這兩天在開始想說，ㄟ怎麼辦我要去飛機場了然後那些人都是講英文、我都還沒準備這樣（笑）對啊，然後可能去、因為我後來沒有去念 presectional 之後就是、因為我們九月八號才是正式的那個 orientation week，然後我就想說提早去就是大概四、五天這樣子，然後去適應一下就是至少是全英文的環境啊什麼的，就是不想要、希望開學後不會那麼辛苦，對。因為我九月一號的飛機，對，所以其實還、下個禮拜一，對還滿緊的，然後，對啊可能接下來就是要開始準備一些小紙條，寫一些要用的英文什麼的，對，目前是還滿擔心去之後可能、因為好像聽說、因為英國有英國腔嘛，然後蘇、因為我要去蘇格蘭，蘇格蘭又有蘇格蘭腔，聽說很重，所以（笑）對啊，就還滿...就最近在想這些事情。

R：那你當初為什麼會想要出國？是你剛是有講說就是到了心理系之後，有同學

E：就學長姊啦，然後同學也有去。然後老師也都是從國外回來的，他們其實在課堂中都會講說他們在國外什麼什麼的。然後可能，啊還有一部分是影集，就我覺得影集、當然他們都是騙人的啦，就是他們都會把、他們的世界就是你知道，演得多好，就是多棒，因為他也不可能影、就不太可能有人會拍一個喔美國的貧民窟的故事吧，對啊，可能他們就是那種你知道生活得還不錯的人，那他們之間發生的故事，所以可能我覺得像電影裡面也是這樣啊，你自己會有一些浪漫的幻想，然後加上ㄟ老師他們也都覺得出國還不錯啊什麼的，對。

R：那你希望、你覺得你這一次出國的經驗，你想要得到什麼？

E：我想要得到什麼喔...其實我比較、我沒有、我沒有

R：就為什麼會選擇是出國而不是留在台灣唸書？

E：台灣的研究所以非、就心理師的研究所、心理系的研究所非常的難考，那競爭非常的強，然後，我不、不覺得我有辦法去準備那麼多科目，因為他可能就要考統計要考心理學什麼各種心理學，然後還要考測驗，反正就是我覺得我沒有、我不是一個、我沒有辦法在繼續考試下去的人，所以我那時候考雅斯我也是覺得很痛苦，但是就至少只要考英文，就你不用再準備別的那些、其實是在逃避啦我想。然後後來...

R：逃避？

E：就是要考試這件事。然後因為我從小都沒有離開過家，所以我、而且我真的非常想要出去看一看，所以我覺得其實我現在的想法就是去那邊可能就是培養自己獨立生活的能力。然後可能去看看除了台北之外的世界，對。所以我也沒有特別多想什麼。

R：所以主要就是想要過一個不一樣的生活

E：之類的

R：然後對、那你對英國這個國家的想法是什麼？在還沒有去之前？

E：現在嗎？

R：你沒有去過嘛對不對？

E：沒有

R：那你對於它的想法是什麼？因為你剛剛提到的影集好像比較都是

E：美國的

R：美國的，好像也不是英國的

E：因為其實我覺得他們兩個好像也差不多啊，因為美國人不是都從英國去的嗎哈哈，對啊。然後、然後因為就是我們那時候學校有派代表來，就是幫我們那個 pre-departure event，然後去，然後他們就

R：哪一個學校派代表來？

E：就是愛丁堡，對然後就去，然後就拍說～他們的城堡啊很漂亮啊，他們的校園很漂亮啊（笑）就照片什麼的，就是然後就是一個氣候怡人，因為今年台灣實在是太熱了，然後他們就說他們的氣候涼爽啊什麼的，對啊就覺得，恩。然後就是走在那個石板路上，就覺得哇特別的棒什麼的哈哈，我不知道，對啊

R：就是有一個憧憬就對了，那樣子的校園

E：之類的，嗯嗯，對啊，就是一個還滿漂亮的地方

R：所以你最後選擇英國而不選擇美國有很大一部分是因為

E：托福

R：托福

E：對

R：覺得 IELTS 比較好考？

E：嗯...也不是，那時候四月嘛，剛剛說我是三月中才決定就是可還是想要出國，但是因為美國的學校他們大概十一、二月就已經截止報名，就是、當然還是有一些別的學校啊，可是就是一些野雞大學才會到這麼後面還在收學生

R：恩哼

E：所以我覺得雖然說現在學界好像對於英國的學歷並不是那麼的推崇，因為可能覺得美國兩年，碩士兩年，可能跟台灣比較像，然後可能也是比較嚴謹的吧，我不知道，因為可能覺得英國碩士一年很快就回來啦，可能你也學不到什麼東西，對。但是我會覺得如果是這樣的狀況下我寧願選擇一個英國比較好的學校而不要去美國的野雞大學，對。

R：恩哼...嗯好像差不多了

E：嗯

R：講完了嗎？

E：你想想看有什麼問題要問我。

**Possible Interview Questions for the Next Time**



### Topic domain: High School English Learning Experience

- a. 你提到你高中的時候非常恨英文，有沒有發生什麼特別印象深刻的事情讓你有如此強烈的感受？
- b. 國中的時候對英文的感覺聽起來沒有這麼負面，但是到高中好像除了英文以外對其他的科目，或說對上學這件事情都變得非常反感，請問國中跨高中的時候有發生什麼特別的事情嗎？或者說有沒有什麼引爆點呢？
- c. 高中的時候非常討厭英文，但是很喜歡歷史、地理，請問老師在這當中扮演的角色是什麼呢？老師的教學方式對你的影響又是什麼呢？

### Topic domain: Learning English with TV series

- a. 你提到升大學以後開始看影集，這件事情對於你的英文學習有很大的影響，也提到主要是加強了聽力，請問有沒有其他的例子讓你發現自己聽力進步了？
- b. 除了聽力以外，對於說、讀、寫的幫助？(單字語用文化 還有其他?)
- c. 通常你看影集的時候，除了單純「看」故事劇情以外，還會做什麼其他事情？
- d. 「看影集」這樣的學習英文方式對於你的整體英文學習上面有些什麼改變？

### Topic domain: Working Experience in an English-only Language School

- a. 你提到大學曾到全英文的補習班當外師助教，這樣的經驗讓你有機會訓練口說，可不可以請你多談談這是一個怎麼樣的過程？
- b. 當助教的時後，你和外師的互動情況通常都是？
- c. 當助教的經驗對於你整體的英文學習之影響是？

### Short Conclusion for the Interview

- a. 老師在受訪者的英文學習經驗中似乎扮演相當重要的角色，而受訪者對於老師的喜好亦左右了受訪者學習英文的意願。其中，老師的態度和教學方式是受訪者重複提到的兩個重點。
- b. 「喜好」及「興趣」對受訪者來說是成功學習英文的關鍵。從受訪者的故事來看，只要喜歡某事物（如喜歡歷史、地理，喜歡看影集，喜歡聽歌）就會付出很多努力學習。相反地，若對某事物沒有興趣，則完全不會有學習的動機或動力，對英文就是如此。這樣的傾向亦反應在後來的工作上，教英文的過程中會特別注意學生的喜好及興趣，而不會以考試為前提或以考試分數看待學生，也會花時間了解學生的感受。