

Investment and Challenges: ESL Learning among Older Adult Chinese-Speaking
Immigrants

Shun-Jen Hsiao

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Reading Committee:

Manka M. Varghese, Chair

Ann M. Elfers

Dafney Blanca Dabach

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Shun-Jen Hsiao

University of Washington

Abstract

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Immigrants

Shun-Jen Hsiao

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Manka Varghese, Ph.D.

Curriculum and Instruction Design

How do older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants experience ESL learning in both classroom and informal community settings? Using Peirce's (1995) investment model, the author conducted a case study on a naturalization ESL program in the United States. Specifically, the author examined the multiple identities of these individuals while learning English, as well as the challenges these learners encounter, including issues such as age, health, isolation from mainstream community, learning strategies, and racial and cultural prejudice. Based on the unique features of this population, the author demonstrates the strategies that administrators and ESL instructors can utilize to enhance the ESL learning experience for this population. Furthermore, the author presents ideas on how government officials can better accommodate this population during their naturalization process.

Keywords: ESL, Chinese Americans, Chinese-speaking immigrants, identity, older adults.

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This study focuses on older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants' investment in ESL learning in a United States naturalization program. I first present an overview of current and historical immigration policies in the United States. Next, I discuss the challenges that older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants might encounter, including health, racial, cultural, residential area, family, and career factors. Finally, I analyze age and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) from both adult development and sociocultural perspectives. I analyze older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants' experiences in learning English as a Second Language because English proficiency is directly related to social opportunities for inclusion, such as U.S. citizenship.

Rational for the Study

Older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants are one of the fastest growing populations of immigrants in the United States. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2006), one in five people in the United States will be 65 or older by 2030. In addition, the older adult population (over 65 years old) in the United States is also expected to increase their racial and ethnic diversity. Currently, older immigrants make up eight percent of all older Americans (Treas & Batalova, 2007, cited by Leach, 2009).

According to the Office of Immigration Statistics (2011), older adult immigrants are a faster growing group compared to the native born population.

The percentage of China born older adult immigrants residing in the United States in 2010 was higher than both the native-born and immigrants overall: 15.4% of Chinese immigrants were 65 years old or older, compared with 13.2% of the native born and 12.4% of immigrants (U.S. Department of Homeland Security [USDHS], 2012). Chinese-speaking immigrants are by far the biggest ethnic Asian American sub-

community in the United States. According to USDHS, 16,000 more Chinese immigrants came to the U.S. in 2011 than in 2010. The U.S. received the second-largest number of immigrants from China (the largest number of immigrants came from Mexico). According to Yen, 35% of immigrants in the United States were from Asian countries in 2003. Immigrants from Taiwan, Mainland China, and Hong Kong constituted 21% of all the Asians that came to the United States (Yen, 2008).

After coming to the U.S., Chinese older adult immigrants have very limited resources to learn English and have little incentive to do so unless they want to naturalize. Older adults generally are less likely to attend schools. In particular, minority older adult immigrants are less likely to attend schools than mainstream older adults (Merriam & Caffarella, 2006). Compared with younger generations, many older adult immigrants simply acquire their Green Cards because of the law of family reunifications (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security [USDHS] (2012), more than half of Chinese immigrants gain Green Cards through the family basis route. They usually do not work or attend school in the United States, so they might miss opportunities to learn the English language. This population is potentially isolated and vulnerable and has a harder time adapting to a different environment. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the language learning experience of this specific population.

Older adult Chinese immigrants have to learn English to participate in mainstream society and pass a citizenship interview if they wish to naturalize. Despite the fact that many older adult immigrants are potentially isolated and vulnerable, most research related to ESL learning and immigrants focuses on K-12 and college students

(Louie, 2004; McKay & Wong, 1996) or younger adults (Peirce, 1995). For example, Louie (2004) describes Chinese-speaking immigrants bi-model in terms of social economic status. Louie states that many Chinese-speaking immigrants work as professionals, while others work for minimum wage jobs. However, older adult Chinese immigrants might be an exception to Louie's model because they have limited experience in attending school or work in the United States (Fisher & Wolf, 1998; Mui, 2007). Older adult Chinese immigrants might be underrepresented in research because few researchers have access to this population.

Only a small portion of literature has touched on older adult immigrants and SLA, but most of it is quantitative research that focuses on statistical analysis, such as participants' age-of-arrival and ESL learning (Service & Crank, 1993; Mackey & Sachs, 2012). Therefore, conducting research by using multiple qualitative research methods is crucial to understanding a combination of unique factors of older adult Chinese immigrants' ESL learning. This study is a qualitative research study that examines the older adult Chinese immigrants' ESL learning experience on naturalization content. I examined how their investment in naturalization content in English affected their identities and social opportunities, including health care, daily life interaction with English speakers, communication with the younger generation and U.S. citizenship.

Focus of Inquiry

Using Peirce's (1995) investment model, I examined this population's investment in ESL naturalization exams and ESL learning. My research study focuses on how the investment model applies to this population. For example, how does investment in English relate to this population's identities? Which selective language

skills do they focus on? In addition, this population might be heavily invested in naturalization content in English in order to become US citizens. I also explored the challenges and coping strategies of older adult Chinese immigrants in learning English. I included cognitive and social perspectives in this research as studies showed that research including both perspectives might help readers see a bigger picture of this population's ESL learning.

More specifically, I examined the following:

1. What is the participants' investment in English?
 - a) What social challenges do the participants experience while learning English in the U.S.?
2. How do they prepare for the naturalization test in English?
 - a) What challenges related to their age do the participants experience while learning naturalization content in English?
 - b) What coping strategies do the participants adopt in the process?

Literature Review

Immigration – An Overview

According to Portes and Rumbaut, the United States receives the highest number of immigrants in the world. In 2005, more than 100 countries sent immigrants to America (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). One might wonder why so many immigrants have come to the United States. However, the question could be why so few immigrants, not so many, make the journey, especially with economic and political difficulties in their home countries. In fact, various barriers hinder people who try to immigrate to another country (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Zhou, 1992; Zhou, 2000), such as the language barriers and visa issues, and only a small percentage of people successfully complete their journey. Most immigrants are from urban, middle-class backgrounds and their educational skills are similar to those of native-born Americans (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Zhou, 1992; Leach, 2009).

88% of immigrants have come from Latin America and Asia since the 1980s (Zhou & Gatewood, 2000; Leach, 2009). One of the main reasons is the economic and political situation of immigrants' home countries and receiving countries, which constructs the "pull" and "push" factors. In addition, in 1965, U.S. Immigration policy re-opened its doors to non-white immigrants. A new immigration policy opened the doors on the basis of two criteria: family reunification and occupational qualifications (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Zhou, 1992; Zhou, 2009). Increasing numbers of non-whites immigrated to the United States, particularly from Asia and Latin America (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). Today, Asians are the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States (Takaki, 1989; Zhou, 2009).

The increasing number of immigrants from China also relates to the increasing number of Chinese international students. According to the Institute of International Education [IEE] (2010), “the number of international students has increased by 8% to an all time high of 671,616 in the 2008/2009 academic year in the United States”. The growth has been driven largely by increasing numbers of international students from China. Many of these students choose to stay in the U.S. to work after graduation. According to the USDHS (2012), more than 1 in 10 employment-based Green Cards are issued to Chinese immigrants. Once the Chinese immigrants naturalize because of occupational qualification, they can bring their parents and siblings to the U.S. via family reunification (Leach, 2009; Zhou, 2000).

Naturalized citizens can sponsor the immigration of their parents without quota restrictions, which encourage a greater number of older immigrants to the U.S. (Leach, 2009). After five years as Green Card holders, their parents are eligible to naturalize (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services [USCIS], 2011). Chinese immigrants show high interest in naturalization. 53% of Chinese immigrants were naturalized U.S. citizens in 2010, compared to only 43.7% of all immigrants (USDHS, 2012).

ESL Learning for Immigrants

Language is a barrier for most immigrants to participate in mainstream society. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, 51.6% of the immigrant population has limited English comprehension. Language is also cited as the main barrier for immigrants who are either minimum-wage laborers or professional elites (Olsen, 1997; Portes & Rumbaut, 1990; Zhou, 1992). Limited English proficiency is a barrier which prevents immigrants from moving into the mainstream community. Immigrants are required to

learn English in order to communicate with mainstream society, as well as to communicate with the younger generation, with health care professionals, and with U.S. immigration authorities. Learning English is the first step for many immigrants to adapt to life in the U.S., from attending school to finding jobs to applying for citizenship.

From a socio-linguistic perspective, Norton and Toohey (2001) suggest that language learners' barriers are not only their own individual factors but also how they are perceived by the community. The access to linguistic resources offered by the community makes a difference to the language learners. In Wang's (1999) study, one of the barriers for Chinese immigrant women is that they did not have opportunities to communicate with target language speakers. As Peirce (1995) summarizes, language learning cannot be separated from the social context. These studies (McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Peirce, 1995) show that language learners' personal identities and social context cannot be separated. Successful language acquisition cannot be dependent on just one of these aspects alone.

Communities play an important role in immigrants' second language learning. For instance, without access to target language speakers from the community, it would be difficult for language learners to be motivated and to have ample opportunities to practice using the target language (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007; Wang, 1999). The Chinese older adult immigrants might be excluded from the mainstream community because of ethnic, age and language factors. I examined whether or not this population has become part of the mainstream community through naturalization and ESL learning.

Research on Chinese-Speaking Immigrants

Chinese immigrants are the largest and oldest ethnic group of Asian immigrants in the United States, and have been settling in the United States since late 1840s (Chen, 2002; Zhou, 2009). Chinese people began immigrating to America after the Opium War (1838-1842). After the war, China was forced to open its door and start trading with the Western countries. However, it was not until the gold rush in California that the Chinese people started immigrating to the United States in large numbers (Chen, 2002; Zhou, 1992; Zhou, 2009). Chinese referred to America as “the gold mountain” and it was commonly believed that going to America was an opportunity to bring home fortune and glory. At the time, Chinese people immigrating to the U.S. mainly came from Southern China, especially Canton Province. Because the most important trading ports were in Southern China, especially Canton Province, the early immigrants spoke Cantonese and carried Cantonese culture (Zhou, 1992). The poorest regions in the West and North of China simply did not have access to the information and family networks to immigrate (Zhou, 1992).

However, few early immigrants fulfilled their “gold mountain” dream of returning to China with fortune and glory.

The early Chinese immigrants made an enormous contribution to the development of the West and the construction of the transcontinental railroad. Yet, as history moved on, few of them made fortunes; and most found only backbreaking toil, poverty, loneliness, and too often, death in the quest for gold. (Zhou, 1992, p. 27)

After the gold mines were exhausted, immigrants began working as railroad workers, farm laborers, and workers in cigar and shoe manufacturing industries. Many of them

ran laundries and restaurants, and relied on Chinatown enclave markets (Chen, 2002; Zhou, 1992).

During the period of the Exclusion Act (1882-1943), most Chinese immigrants faced great difficulties immigrating to the United States while facing increasing economic, political, and social instability in China (Chan, 2006). Most early Chinese-speaking immigrants encountered difficult working situations and discrimination when they first came to America. They were forced to pay extra taxes and were excluded from many professions (Zhou, 1992; Zhou & Gatewood, 2000). Thus, most Chinese immigrants at that time did not intend to settle in the U.S., but dreamed of returning to China one day.

However, after Communists gained control over China after World War II, most early immigrants gave up hope of returning to China and decided to stay in the U.S. Many elite-class Chinese-speaking immigrants were also granted visas to the U.S. to escape Communism at the same time. The new and old immigrants alike abandoned the dream of going home one day with fortune, and chose to stay in the United States. From that point, Chinese immigrants changed from their “old image of the inassimilable sojourners into a new more sympathetic image of model minority” (Zhou, 1992, p. 37).

Racial and cultural identities played an important role in Chinese-speaking immigrants’ experience in learning English, because their racial and cultural identities influenced their access to the linguistic resources of their communities (Chen, 2002; Norton & Toohey, 2001). Today, many Chinese-speaking immigrants feel insecure in the U.S. and consider themselves foreigners in this country even after having become United States citizens (Banks, 2004; Takaki, 1989; Zhou & Gatewood, 2000). The same

situation also happens to America-born Chinese. Young Chinese-Americans feel that they are invisible or they do not fit anywhere because they do not “look like Americans” (Banks, 2004; Chang, 2006; Takaki, 1989; Tung, 2000). Therefore, based on a sociocultural perspective, I interviewed and observed the participants to explore the opportunities to learn English offered by the community.

Factors for Chinese-Speaking Immigrants’ Participation in ESL Learning

There are unique factors influencing older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants’ ESL learning, including their cultural identities, socio-economic status and other factors, such as health issues (Chang, 2006; Kubota & Lin, 2006; Mui, 2007; Tung, 2000; Yen, 2008). Chinese-speaking immigrants arriving after 1965 have mostly been family-sponsored immigrants. About 75% were admitted as immediate family members, including spouse, unmarried children, and parents (Zhou & Gatewood, 2000). To become a citizen, older adult Chinese immigrants are required to take the naturalization test. In order to take the naturalization test, most of them are required to prepare for the test in English. However, older adult Chinese immigrants might encounter the following issues:

Health issues. Health situations hinder older adult Chinese immigrants’ participation in the mainstream community and ESL learning. Research shows that older adult Chinese immigrants have worse health outcomes than average U.S. citizens, and Chinese immigrants’ English proficiency is also associated with their health outcomes (Mui, 2007). The research suggests that immigrants are less likely to receive the same quality of health care as the majority group. Chinese immigrants have limited access to information about medical care or health insurance because of language and

cultural barriers. For example, they might have limited options (clinics located in Chinatowns or doctors who speak Chinese). They might not be able to utilize the welfare system because of their English comprehension. In addition, they might not be able to attend ESL classes because of their health issues. Their English comprehension and health issues might reinforce each other.

Racial and cultural factors. Second or third-generation descendants of Asian immigrants are still often considered to be in a state of “perpetual foreignness” even though they were born in the United States (Takaki, 1989). According to Takaki (1989), descendants of Asian immigrants are often perceived as “un-American” even though they have been in the U.S. for generations.

One of the examples Takaki states is that he was asked, “your English is excellent; where did you learn English?” even though his family has lived in the United States for more than a century. Chinese immigrants might face discrimination by the mainstream population. One study (Scales, Wennerstorm, Richard, & Wu, 2006) shows that among American, British, Spanish and Chinese accents, the Chinese accent was the least preferred by American undergraduate students. Norton and Toohey’s study (2001) also suggests that European immigrants might be more accessible to target language speakers than other immigrants because race is still an issue in school and work settings. In other words, minority immigrants have a harder time communicating with target language speakers in both work and social settings. Therefore, both cultural and racial identities should be taken into account in older adult Chinese immigrants’ participation in learning English.

Residential area. Residential area could also be an important factor for participating in the mainstream community. According to Lin and Zhou, compared to early immigrants, Chinese people who immigrated to the United States after 1965 tend to speak Mandarin and other dialects and have a different tradition than immigrants from Canton province. Because of the difference in socioeconomic background and culture, newer generations of Chinese immigrants tend to stay away from the Cantonese-dominated old Chinatowns (Lin, 2007; Zhou, 1992).

Studies on K-12 or traditional-age college students show that Chinese immigrants who live in suburban and ethnically mixed areas have better English comprehension than those who live in Chinatowns (Lin, 1996; Louie, 2004). According to Peirce (1995), the return on investment is equal to the effort expended on learning the target language. Chinese immigrants who live in suburbs tend to have a higher social-economic status and access to other ethnic groups, and the incentive is higher to invest in English. On the contrary, Chinese immigrants who live in Chinatowns tend to have a more enclave life style and lower social-economic status (Zhou, 1990; Zhou, 2009), and the incentive to invest in English is lower because it is not essential to learn English to find jobs or participate in the local communities. However, older adult Chinese immigrants might be an exception because they lack the language skill and social network that gives suburban immigrants access to English speakers. In other words, they might live in suburban areas but are still isolated from English speakers. The same way is true for senior housing where they might live with English speakers but they lack the language skills and social networking skills that allow them the opportunities to talk in English with English speakers.

Family issues. Loss of the family unit could be another common issue among Taiwanese immigrants (Lin, 1996). According to Lin (1996), many Taiwanese immigrants have family members overseas. Immigrants from China might have similar situations. For example, the father might work in China or Taiwan while the mother, children and grandparents live in the U.S., or for example, an older adult Chinese immigrant might have adult children in the U.S. and other children still in China or Taiwan. The former situation might be more difficult; since the father is away, the mother or grandparents might have to play the role of the father figure. Chinese immigrants continue to have close ties with their homeland. In addition, many Chinese immigrants have very little time with their family because of the long hours of work in an enclave economic system (Zhou, 1992). Grandparents might have to step up and resume the responsibility of the parents.

Career issues. It could be challenging for Chinese immigrants to assume professional jobs in America (Takaki, 1989, Zhou, 2009). Yen (2008) points out that the loss of professional careers and income is another issue faced by Chinese immigrants. It is not uncommon that Chinese-speaking immigrants suffer downturns in their careers, such as from being a professor in China to working in food manufacturing in the U.S. (Louie, 2004; Zhou, 1992). For Chinese immigrants who do not speak fluent English, the employment opportunities are limited. Many choose to work in enclave economic systems in Chinatowns.

In summary, these barriers, including health situations, racial discrimination, residential area, family and careers issues might hinder older adult Chinese immigrants' transformation from immigrants to participants in the mainstream community. Literature

has indicated that participating with mainstream community for older Chinese immigrants is crucial (Lai, 2009). For example, Lai (2009) states that older adult Chinese immigrants in Canada have worse mental health outcome than Chinese immigrants in other major cities in China, Taiwan or Hong Kong. Therefore, Lai suggests “Development of community education programs for the aging population and providing more continuing and life-long learning opportunities are recommended to meet the needs of an aging society” (Lai, 2009, p. 256). I interviewed the older adult participants about challenges and coping strategies in learning English both inside the classrooms and in the local communities.

Norton and Toohey (2001) and Wang (1999) suggest that language learners’ barriers are not only individual factors but also how learners are perceived by the community. The access to linguistic resources offered by the community makes a difference to the language learners. Studies (McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Peirce, 1995) have shown that language learners’ personal identities and social context cannot be separated. This phenomenon might also be more noticeable for older adult Chinese immigrants because they have limited access to English speakers. As Wang (1999) points out, one of the major complaints from both younger and older adult immigrants in her study is that they did not have the “environment” to study English. In order to explore and understand this phenomenon, I interviewed the student participants on their social networks in various settings.

In the next chapter, I discuss older adult Chinese immigrants’ experience in ESL learning from the literature of SLA theories. First, I analyze theories in SLA literature in order to have a better understanding of how to conduct research on this specific

population for this research purpose. This population invests in English for a specific purpose: to become U.S. citizens. Based on that, I discuss this population's investment in English from a sociocultural perspective. In the end, I argue that qualitative research is crucial to understand the investment, identities, challenges and coping strategies of this population.

Theoretical Framework

There are several major theories in SLA. SLA theories have been proposed to explain second language learners and the learning contexts. Behaviorism had a powerful influence on SLA theories from 1940 to 1970 (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). The focus was on imitation of the language rules. This theory assumed that fluency in a second language depends on the acquisition of “a set of rules relating to both grammatical accuracy and sociolinguistic appropriateness” (McKay & Wong, 1996, p. 579). However, little recognition was given to learning processes, individual variables, or the social context.

Psychological/cognitive theories have increasingly become important in SLA development since 1990 (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). From a cognitive developmental perspective, SLA scholars argue that learners’ mental development and personal characteristics (Brown, 2007; Lightbown & Spada, 2006) contribute to the success and failure of the language learning, for instance, whether the learner is introverted or extroverted (Brown, 2007). However, while researchers shift from rules of grammar and lexicon to individual differences, the complex social difference still left one question unanswered: why do some learners draw every resource to learn in some settings or on some topics but keep silent in other ones (McKay & Wong, 1996)? For example, L2 learners in Norton’s (2000) research showed interest in learning about American culture, but they were not necessarily interested in learning about other immigrants’ experiences in their home countries.

Unlike cognitivist scholars, SLA theorists from a social perspective argue that social factors, such as the ways that the immigrants are treated in the learning

environment, rather than individual factors, have a stronger influence on learning the second language (Peirce, 1995). For instance, the smaller the social distance between second language learners and the target language group, the better the language learning is enhanced. If the social distance between the two groups is too great, then the second language learners group will have little chance of mastering the target language because they will not have the opportunity to practice the language (Schumann, 1976, as cited in Peirce, 1995). Therefore, from a sociocultural perspective, even if learners possess good learning characteristics, their language learning might not be successful if “they are not able to gain access to social relationships in situations where they are perceived as valued partners in communication” (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 56).

There are major differences between cognitive and social perspectives. Cognitivist scholars view speaking and thinking as independent processes. On the contrary, thinking and speaking are viewed as tightly interwoven from a social perspective. L2 learners can gain control over their mental process by interacting with others (Long, 2007). Therefore, second language use is equal to second language learning. The critique for sociocultural SLA theories from cognitivist scholars is that the focus is not on second language acquisition, but only second language use. Cognitivist scholars argue that usage does not equal learning or acquisition. Although L2 acquisition occurs through participation in conversation, using a second language does not mean learning a second language. SLA is centrally about acquisition, not usage (Ellis, 2008; Larsen-Freeman, 2007).

From the sociocultural perspective, language usage and acquisition cannot be easily separated. The identities which learners adopt make a difference in their SLA.

For example, members of some immigrants or minority groups might feel that they do not have an equal relationship with mainstream populations in various settings like work or school. However, cognitivist SLA has not touched on these issues. From the cognitivist SLA perspective, language is a mental construct instead of social construct. The learner's identity is the learner, not multiple, ever-changing and contrasting identities.

Both theories have been increasingly important in SLA. Larsen-Freeman (2007) suggests that it is essential for researchers to include both social and cognitivist factors in SLA theories. For example, McKay and Wong's study (1996) examined both participants' coping strategies and their identity shifts through investing in English. Theories that focus only on the learners' personalities or social context separately fail to explain the interaction between both factors.

I have examined investment in ESL learning, coping strategies, challenges for this specific population, and cognitive development of aging. Although I focus on the participants' investment in ESL naturalization class, I have included literature from the mainstream psychological perspective. I include both perspectives in this research and respond to Larsen-Freeman's call that research in SLA can include both sociocultural and psychological perspectives (Larsen-Freeman, 2004; McKay & Wong, 1996).

Investment Model

Duff defined the concept of investment as “in a somewhat more dynamic, emergent, and socially constructed view than in earlier accounts, explaining that motivation needed to be radically re-conceptualized and re-theorized in the context of contemporary notions of self and identity” (as cited in Ushioda and Dornyei, 2009, p. 1).

Although motivation was considered a personal characteristic in cognitivist SLA theories (Brown, 2007), it cannot fully express the language learner's agency, nor can the idea explain why some learners are able to learn English in some settings but not others (McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton, 2000; Peirce, 1995). Peirce (1995) proposes the concept of "investment" instead of motivation because investment indicates each learner has multiple, sometimes contradictory identities in a social context. Learners who invest in the target language also invest in their own identities. Motivation alone does not illustrate the complexity of second language learners' attitudes toward learning English because learners' social networks and their power structures should be taken into account (Norton, 2000; Peirce, 1995). Focusing on motivation not only simplifies the learner's subjectivity but it may also indicate that the unsuccessful learner is blamed for not making him/herself "more motivated" (McKay & Wong, 1996).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the status of language learners is not equal to the status of native speakers. Learners invest in the language to attain the resources that they cannot attain otherwise. Investment in a second language does not simply mean to master an L2, but to shift identity from an immigrant to a target language speaker. This study analyzes the participants' ESL learning based on the investment model which includes naturalization content and demonstrates that investment does not equal motivation.

Peirce (1995) also indicates that learners have multiple identities which are sometimes even contradictory, and every time learners use the target language they reorganize their identities, and invest in the target language. Morgan further states

“Language is used to put people in their place and people use language to change the place in which they have been put” (Morgan, 1998, p. 12).

According to Peirce (1995), immigrant women in her study show different levels of motivation in different social contexts. One example from her research was a newly arrived immigrant woman who decided to stop going to the ESL class because of her teacher’s assignment. The ESL teacher asked the students to introduce their home countries. Even though the projects could be resourceful, the immigrant woman felt the information was not helpful for her situation in the U.S. She stated that learning about cultures in other countries could not improve her life in the U.S. She felt the school should teach her information she can use in the U.S. Peirce (1995) suggests that learners “invest” in a second language to acquire a wider range of resources, which will in turn increase their social capital. Therefore, the concept “investment” states that language learners have purposes in learning languages, and the purposes usually relate to their identities.

Learners who invest in each of the language skills (reading, speaking, etc.) can be highly selective because “different skills can have different values in relation to learner identities”(Norton, 2000, p. 11). Older adult Chinese immigrants might not plan to study in academic settings or need extensive reading and writing skills. Therefore, they might focus more on listening and speaking. However, according to Wang (1999), older adults often have a harder time with listening and pronunciation than younger adults. In addition, there is a reading and writing portion in the naturalization exam. Because of this discrepancy, I have examined whether or not the findings, that each

language skill can be highly selective depending on the learners' identities, apply to this population.

Identity and SLA

Norton defined identity as “how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future” (Norton, 1997, p. 410). The relationship between language and identity might not be clear because theories of language and identities are inconclusive and conflicting (Norton, 1997).

From a socio-linguistic perspective, identity is considered a significant factor in SLA. Bourdieu suggests that the value ascribed to speech cannot be understood apart from the person who speaks, and the person who speaks cannot be understood apart from larger networks of social relationships (as cited in Norton, 2000, p.8). Norton and Toohey (2001) also argue that even if the L2 learners have desirable learning characteristics (highly motivated), they still might not be successful L2 learners if they cannot gain access to social relations because they might not be perceived as valuable partners in communication. In other words, learners' barriers are not only their own individual factors but also how they are perceived by the community. The access to linguistic resources offered by the community makes a difference to language learners. Norton argues that identity relates to desire for recognition and affiliation. Such desires cannot be separated from the distribution of material resources in society (Norton, 1997). As Norton (2000) argues “language teaching is not a neutral practice but a highly political one” (p. 7). It is through language that a person gains access or is denied access

to certain social networks. For the participants in this study, it is through English that they gain access or are denied access to the American citizenship.

Age and SLA

Children are widely considered to outperform adults in learning a second language. The general consensus seems to be “the earlier the better” in learning a language. Most of research agrees on the basis that younger children tend to make slower progress in the beginning, but given enough exposure and time, they can achieve native-like proficiency in the end (Ellis, 2008; Long, 2007). On the contrary, older children and adults perform better in the beginning, especially in grammar, but cannot eventually achieve native-like proficiency, particularly in pronunciation (Long, 2007).

The critical period hypothesis claims that there is a fixed span of years (even though the specific age is undetermined) during which language learning takes place naturally and effortlessly, and after which it is not possible to be completely successful. Pakowski hypothesized that only those who have begun learning their L2 before the age of 15 could achieve full, native like mastery of that language. Johnson and Newport also found that the age of arrival in the United States is a significant factor for succeeding in the language test, as the learners who arrive of youngest ages achieve the highest score (as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Although critical period hypothesis is highly debated, most research does support that there is a gradual decline of the ability to learn a second language as learners get older (Ellis, 2008; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Long, 2007).

In Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle’s research on native English speakers learning Dutch, the adolescents did best, followed by the adults, with the children last. However,

there were only small differences in pronunciation, and the grammar differences diminished over time as the children began to catch up (as cited in Ellis, 2008). The findings show that pronunciation declines linearly as the learners' ages increase. In addition, Wang's findings (1999) showed that Chinese women immigrants whose age of arrival was 40 to 55 had a harder time in listening and pronunciation in English than their classmates whose age of arrival was 25 to 35. Wang's findings also indicate that the ability to learn a L2 declines as learners' ages increase in adulthood.

Wang (1999) also suggests that later-arrival immigrant women are less confident in ESL learning. More participants who arrive at an older adult stage think that they might not be able to become fluent English speakers because of their age. Most participants in Wang's (1999) study stated that increasing age means a declining ability to learn a new language. However, Wang argues that opportunities to communicate with English speakers, learning strategies and beliefs of success might account for the differences between younger and older English learners. Therefore, I analyzed the factors that contribute to SLA from the perspective of older adult Chinese immigrants.

Research Design

I conducted a qualitative research study because the focus of this study was to examine older adult Chinese immigrants' experiences in naturalization courses, focusing on their investment, challenges and coping strategies in naturalization courses.

“Qualitative research is interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experience” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). Instead of numbers and charts, qualitative research focuses on interpreting participants' experiences. Qualitative research is applicable to this type of study because it can examine the participants' investment in English and the selective language skills of the participants' focuses, coping strategies and challenges.

I conducted this research over five months. The timeframe for data collection was approximately from September 1, 2012 to February 1, 2013. I interviewed and observed my participants and analyzed their documents in order to explore the social and psychological factors in SLA including the multiple identities of the participants, investment in English and the naturalization content in the context of naturalization courses. I examined my participants' difficulties in learning and improvement in any particular language skills. I interviewed and observed my participants multiple times during the research period.

As Merriam (2009) points out, “a case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 40). My research was a case study of four older adult Chinese-speaking immigrant participants in a naturalization education program. I chose this program because most students in the program were older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants. Although it was not an ethnographic study, I used ethnographic methods,

including interviews, observations and document analysis. Ethnographic methods enabled me to analyze the participants' interactions with other participants, family and community members in various social discourses. Readers of this study could have a deeper understanding of the participants in a naturalization program because the ethnographic methods focus on the "thick description" of their lived experiences (Merriam, 2009). There is very limited research related to the ESL learning experience of older adult Chinese immigrants, and using ethnographic methods enabled me to better understand the whole picture of my participants' learning experiences.

Participants and Settings

I chose the ESL naturalization program at the Pacific Chinese Culture Center (PCCC) as my research site because most students in this program were older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants (the names of participants and the community setting are pseudonyms). PCCC was located in the Pacific Northwest. In addition, I had volunteered and worked at the ESL naturalization program of PCCC since 2007. I had access to the students and staff. PCCC had a cozy and familial ambience because of the friendly atmosphere that the staff had created. One side of PCCC had three newly furnished classrooms, and the other side had its main office. PCCC provided legal, educational and various other services for Chinese-speaking immigrants (About Us, 2008). Many of the adult students at PCCC were retired or could not find jobs. They depended on their children or received state or government assistance, including food stamps, cash assistance, and medical care. PCCC had many stories on its website that illustrated how the center has changed Asian immigrants' lives (Volunteering, 2008). In this official website, PCCC stated that there were more and more potential clients who

needed help from the center in various respects because of the increasing number of immigrants from Asia.

As a non-profit organization, PCCC's budget mostly relied on city and state funding. As a result, volunteers were crucial for PCCC. PCCC had about 60 staff and 400 volunteers. In the ESL naturalization program, there was one staff member and about 20 volunteers overseeing 6 naturalization and 3 ESL courses. Volunteer teachers taught most classes. Naturalization classes and ESL classes were offered at PCCC based on the quarterly system. Although both courses were conducted bilingually, ESL classes focused on daily life English, and naturalization classes focused on the naturalization exam, which had certain required teaching materials based on USCIS documents, including the naturalization application form and U.S. history and civic textbooks. Based on the 2011 PCCC student profiles, about 25.6% of students at PCCC were 65 years old or older; 44 % of students were from 50 to 64 years old; the oldest student in the program was 87 years old. Students were mainly immigrants from China (75.9%), Taiwan (3%) and Vietnam (16.5%). About 59 % of students were female, and 41 % were male. There are about 10-18 students in each class. Students' ages vary significantly. The younger students are in their 20s or 30s. The older students are in their 70s or 80s. There are obviously more female students than male students. During the classes, younger students tend to help older adult students because younger students are usually more competent in English. In addition, younger Cantonese-speaking students often help older ones to translate from Mandarin to Cantonese.

Table 1

Overview of the classes observed at PCCC

Classes observed	Classroom A	Classroom B
First Quarter Teacher	Mr. Wu	Jeff
Second Quarter Teacher	Justin	Larry
Number of the participants	13 students (5 male and 8 female students)	16 students (5 male and 11 female students)
Ages of the participants	Under 50 years old: 3 50-65 years old: 6 Over 65 years old: 4	Under 50 years old: 5 50-65 years old: 4 Over 65 years old: 7

I recruited the research participants from the volunteer teachers and older adult students at the naturalization program of PCCC. The population of student participants was a mix of older adult Chinese immigrants, both Mandarin and Cantonese speakers, who had been in the United States for a minimum of four years and were over 65 years old. Student participants could not be native English speakers. It was necessary that my research student participants were 65 years old or older because my focus was on older adults. Using Peirce's investment model, I conducted research on their investment in English in the United States. The research student participants lived in the United States for more than four years because I intended to explore their life experience in the United States. The teacher participants were volunteer naturalization teachers who had been teaching naturalization English at PCCC for at least 6 months. The teacher participants

were also the teachers of the student participants because I intended to know the student participants through the teacher participants. Teachers who were familiar with the system and students at PCCC were able to describe students' behaviors in class and their progress in English. Teacher participants only reported the behaviors and progress in English of the students. I was able to abstract from their reports and see the relationship between various social identities and ESL learning.

Volunteer teachers teach the students for at least one quarter (10 weeks). Teachers usually stay for only one or two quarters because they are volunteers or interns from nearby universities. Teachers teach the students based on the textbook and lesson plans created by PCCC. Teachers teach the naturalization content to prepare the students for the naturalization interview.

I chose the participants at PCCC based on my access to the school and the older adult student population. Older adult students who came to PCCC for naturalization class intended to become U.S. citizens. The Chinese-speaking immigrants who were included in this study were older adult students who had beginning or intermediate level English comprehension. The Chinese immigrants who were excluded from this study might be fluent English speakers because advanced English speakers often studied for the naturalization test on their own. Chinese immigrants who could not naturalize (such as undocumented immigrants) or did not intend to naturalize were not likely to attend PCCC. According to the USDHS (2012), about 1.2% of undocumented immigrants (about 130,000 people) were from China. In addition, Chinese immigrants who did not live in the urban area where PCCC was located might not be able to attend the class because of limited transportation options.

I recruited four individual older adult students to participate in this study because this inquiry method focused on depth. With four participants, this study could have an in-depth description of each individual but also compare various cases in multiple social discourses with peers, teachers or family members in various settings. I examined how student participants engaged in social discourses. I examined how the participants defined their values, beliefs, and lifestyles. I selected participants based on their ages, gender, and social-economic status.

According to Patton (2003), purposely picking a wide range of cases to get variation of dimensions of interest helped researchers capture a wide spectrum of activities and phenomena. Using a maximum variation method could enhance transferability of this study. For older adult student participants, I maximized sample variation by creating a matrix that displayed how each individual was as different as possible in older ages (e. g. 65 years old versus 80 years old), gender and region of origin in China.

Data Collection

In order to provide a rich description of Chinese-speaking immigrants' English investment during their ESL learning experience and to enhance the research's validity and credibility, I triangulated three types of data collection methods: interviews, observations and document analysis. Using three kinds of collection methods enabled me to fully understand older adult students, ESL teachers and family and community members' perceptions and to help me connect the theories to their thoughts. For each participant, I conducted an initial interview and a follow-up interview. I compared the

difference between the early stages of their English learning with the latter stages and examined the investment in English of each individual participant.

Interviews. I interviewed both older adult students and volunteer teachers at PCCC. As Merriam (2009) indicates, interviews are probably the most common form of data collection in qualitative studies. My interview questions were based on observing my participants' experiences in participating in the naturalization class. As Patton (1990) suggests, we interview people so we can find out the things we cannot observe. For example, we cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. Wang (1999) suggests that the interview method "allows me to gain a sense of how adult learners perceive and experience learning an L2, and to use their insight as a source of information in addressing the issue of age and adult L2 acquisition" (p. 4). In summary, interviews allow the researcher to understand the participants' experiences and interpretations of events from the participants' perspective.

My interview protocols include closed ended, semi-structured and informal questions. Closed-ended questions are used for demographic information. According to Merriam (2009), putting demographic questions at the beginning could be helpful for interviewees who start by answering less complicated questions. The rest of the questions are semi-structured and informal because open-ended questions can yield more detailed response and "less structure formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways" (Merriam, 2009, p.90). The interviews of student participants were conducted in Mandarin because student participants had limited English comprehension. The interviews of volunteer English-speaking teachers were conducted in English. The interview with the volunteer teacher, Mr. Wu, was conducted

in Mandarin because Mandarin is his first language. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. I translated the transcription from Chinese to English. Another bilingual research assistant then verified my transcription.

Older adult students. Interviews were conducted twice with four older adult Chinese student participants individually. Topics of the interview questions for the students include their background information, experience in learning English and naturalization content, and investment in English because ESL learning and preparation for the U.S. citizenship exam are the main focus of my research. For example, I asked, “How do you learn naturalization content in English?” “Why do you want to become a U.S. citizen?” and “How comfortable do you feel talking to English speakers?” Their responses might show that they were taking ownership of English and the process for achieving U.S. citizenship.

ESL teachers. Interviews were conducted with four volunteer ESL citizenship teachers individually. Topics of the interview questions for ESL teachers include the teaching material and interaction between the teacher and the older adult students. For example, I asked, “What kinds of teaching activities enhance students’ motivation during the citizenship class?” and “What kinds of assignments do you give students?”

The purpose of the interviews is to understand the factors that influence students’ investment in ESL learning from the teachers’ perspective. Another goal is to clarify whether preparation for the naturalized test helped the immigrant students construct their social network and enhance their investment in English. What did ESL teachers take into account while working with students?

Observation. The observation setting was participants' ESL naturalization classrooms (see Appendix B for observation guides). The class typically met twice a week. I observed two classes (See Table 1). The two naturalization classes, designated A and B (See Table 1), typically met twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I observed both classes (A and B) once per week for five months, for each of two quarters (First Quarter and Second Quarter). Each of the four student participants studied in one of these classes. The class ran from 90 to 120 minutes. The focus of observation was on the student participants' answers to the naturalization interview questions asked during the class sessions. For example, we discussed their reasons to naturalize; their plans to register to vote, their opinion of the Chinese Communist Party, their view of American politics, and their English improvement. I observed how their answers changed over time. I took field notes during the observation, which enabled me to have a more detailed description of what happened during my observation. Keeping detailed field notes made it easier for me to analyze the data later (Merriam, 2009). I also reviewed my notes immediately following the observation or recorded myself talking about what happened during my observation to strengthen my recording of the observation.

The focus of the observation in the classroom included the overall classroom environment (e.g., table arrangement, how the students sat), the teachers' perspectives toward the students (e.g., how the teacher's attitude affected their students, how their approach or material accommodated their students), and interactions between the teacher and students (bilingual or monolingual). I took field notes during the observation. I explored this population's investment in English. I could notice students' investment in English in different social settings. For example, I noted whether a participant who had

only cared about Chinese news transferred his or her interest to U.S. national or local news. However, I did not keep a formal checklist of events and behavior to observe; instead, I would allow data to emerge. In this study, observation and documentations of the focal older adult Chinese immigrant students were focused on the school context where they interact with classmates and teachers.

Document analysis. The focus of the document analysis was through the framework of language investment, and the focal student participants' coping strategies and challenges. The documents that influenced students' identities in social discourses were examined. The documents included: (1) Teacher lesson plan; (2) Teaching materials: textbooks and handouts; (3) Students' homework; (4) Naturalization exam materials.

Data Analysis

The steps taken for this analysis included (1) reading of all the relevant data, including field notes, transcriptions, and documents; listening to the interviews; (2) open coding the relevant data (Merriam, 2009); (3) focused coding of all data; (4) the development of the hypothesis regarding support from the analysis of my participants' experiences in classrooms. Interviews, observational data and documents were hand-coded. I began coding the data with five categories in mind: multiple identities of the participants, focus on selective language skills, challenges, learning strategies and naturalization content. The focus codes corresponded to the research questions of this study, which are:

1. What is the participants' investment in English?
 - a) What social challenges do the participants experience while learning

English in the U.S.?

2. How do they prepare for the naturalization test in English?
 - a) What challenges related to their age do the participants experience while learning naturalization content in English?
 - b) What coping strategies do the participants adopt in the process?

Investment in English: Identities and social challenges

Introduction

This chapter examines the social challenges and multiple identities that student participants face while learning English. First, this chapter introduces the student and teacher participants that are in this study and the student participants' ESL learning in the classroom and community. Secondly, this study critically examines the students' isolation from the mainstream community. This article finds that isolation from the mainstream community has a negative effect on their ESL learning. I then discuss the participants' language, nationality, political, and classroom identities. By critically examining the student participants' identities in various discourses, this study argues that the student participants' ESL learning and their decision to naturalize is highly related to their various identities.

Overview of the Student Participants

The participants of this study were four older adult students and four volunteer citizenship teachers at the ESL program at PCCC. However, I talked with other students and teachers during my class observation and they also provided me with valuable insight for this research. All of the student participants were Chinese-speaking immigrants who had been in the U.S. for at least four years and are 65 years old or older. I conducted research with the participants from September 1, 2012 to February 1, 2013. During this time period, I spent about four to six hours every week in observing students' classes. I interviewed volunteer teachers and students. I analyzed textbooks, handouts, lesson plans, students' reflection notes, and students' class notes from the

naturalization class. First, I discuss briefly the four student participants. All of the names of the participants are pseudonyms.

Mr. Kuo was from Taiwan. He was 67 years old. He was a government employee. He held a Green Card for more than ten years, but traveled between Taiwan and the U.S. After retiring three years ago, he settled down in the U.S. He lived with his wife and daughter in the suburbs. He also had a son who works in California. He learned English when he was at secondary school and college. However, he still had difficulty listening to and speaking English. Mr. Kuo spoke Chinese at home and at the church, which was his main social setting. He used to study ESL at a community college but focused mainly on naturalization content before passing the naturalization exam. He passed the naturalization exam and had naturalized in November 2012. After naturalization, he spent most of his time at home with his wife and babysitting his friend's two babies. However, he still attended ESL classes offered by PCCC on Saturdays regularly.

Mr. Lin was from Northern China. He was 79 years old. He started learning English 7 years ago when he first came to the U.S. He was a professor of physical education in China. He learned Russian and studied with a Russian professor when he was at a university. After coming to the U.S., he lived with his wife in senior housing. He spoke Chinese at home. He was the only one participant who had not applied for the naturalization exam. He told me there were multiple reasons that he did not want to naturalize, but the main reason was that the Chinese government might cancel his pension. Nevertheless, he still came to the classes to learn naturalization content. Naturalization classes at PCCC made him interested in English. He wanted to learn daily

life English. He regularly wrote articles in a local Chinese newspaper, which showed his desire to communicate with Chinese readers through words. He wanted to work as a writer and translator in the future. He was the only participant who wanted to learn reading and writing in English beyond naturalization content.

Ms. Wong was from Canton, China. She was 72 years old. Ms. Wong was a homemaker. She started learning English after she came to the U.S. five years ago. She studied Russian when she was at secondary school. She was retired and lived both in senior housing and at her daughter's apartment. She spoke Chinese mostly but sometimes spoke English with her 10-year-old granddaughter. She studied at PCCC for two years. It took two hours for her to come to the center from her daughter's home. However, she failed the naturalization exam twice. After that, she took some time off before trying again. She thought the test was unfair because "my questions were much harder than the questions of others" but later admitted that she did not have enough of a foundation of English to pass the exam. She had been busy taking care of her daughter and granddaughter since then.

Ms. Chen came from Central China four years ago. She was 65 years old. She owned a small factory in China. She studied Russian in China in secondary school. She started learning English after she married her European American husband 4 years ago. She was retired and lived with her husband. Her husband was an English speaker and did not speak Chinese. She was the only participant who spoke English at home. There were usually two international students living with them. She studied ESL at a community college while studying for naturalization at PCCC. However, she failed the exam in November 2012. She also expressed that the test was not fair and "they already

decided who won't pass before the test began." She passed the citizenship exam on the second attempt in January 2013. She did not come back to the center after that.

Overview of the Teacher Participants

All four teacher participants volunteered at PCCC without any financial compensation. Three of the teacher participants were native English speakers and they taught at PCCC for more than 6 months. All three native English-speaking teachers were interested in Asian culture and learning Asian languages. Jeff and Larry were learning Chinese while Justin was learning Japanese and Korean. Jeff was working part time at a community college. Justin and Larry were college students. The only one non-native English-speaking teacher, Mr. Wu, had been in the U.S. for 7 years. He was retired. Mr. Wu was from China and a former student of the program. He passed the naturalization exam about one year ago. After becoming an U.S. citizen, he volunteered at PCCC as an instructor. Interviews with Mr. Wu were conducted in Mandarin.

Larry and Jeff had a basic understanding of the Chinese language (Mandarin) and could have limited communication with students Mandarin during class sessions. However, the classes were conducted mostly in English. Justin did not speak any Chinese, but he could communicate with students in Chinese characters because of his knowledge in Japanese. Interviews with Jeff, Larry and Justin were conducted in English.

A language barrier might be a factor in terms of teacher-student relationship. All teacher participants at PCCC felt students were very respectful. Larry had a very good relationship with his students. First he memorized their names in the first two weeks. He also understood most of what students said. Even though he mostly spoke English, he

sometimes used Chinese in the classroom. He stated “I want to let them know I respect their culture, and make them more interested in me and that way we have a better relationship.” According to Larry, his teaching strategy was: “to be comfortable, and don’t be too formal, make them feel comfortable, and they will absorb the material better.” Jeff praised the students about their ESL achievement and being respectful: “They will study materials and ask me good questions. They were punctual. Their attendance was good. They were appreciative and respectable.” In contrast, According to Justin, “the relationship seems fairly formal to me.” The difference might be the language barrier because Justin did not speak Mandarin while Larry and Jeff could speak proficient Mandarin.

ESL Learning in the Classroom

Learners who invested in each of the four language skills (reading, speaking, listening and writing) could be highly selective because “different skills can have different values in relation to learner identities” (Norton, 2000, p. 11). Almost everyone in the program wanted to work on the four skills. However, most of them first focused on listening and speaking. It seemed reasonable because the naturalization exam focused on listening and speaking comprehension. In addition, they had to listen and speak English to participants in the mainstream community. However, Mr. Lin, whose articles can be seen at multiple local Chinese newspapers, wanted to be able to write in English, so he focused tremendously on writing while others wanted to be able to communicate and focus on listening and speaking. His identity as a writer affected his focus on ESL learning. On the contrary, Ms. Wong focused on listening and speaking. According to Ms. Wong, she was worried because her daughter came home so late; she admits, “I

need to study English. I need to speak English when my daughter was not around.” Ms. Wong’s identity as a caregiver affected her investment in the certain selective language skills in English.

Students and teachers alike felt grammar and pronunciation were crucial for the naturalization exam, so they paid attention to both areas. According to Justin, “They just basically focus on citizenship. If it relates to ESL generally, they generally like it. Like pronunciation and sentence order which improve their English generally”.

Larry stated: Grammar, pronunciation can use some work...the way I see it they don’t need to speak English perfectly, but they have to be able to communicate, and take the message across to the officials in order for them to pass the test, so we don’t put too much focus on exact grammar, basic grammar yes, we don’t go into very deep into grammar, because it’s just not necessary. But if it’s like capitalize or basic, everything [that] they will get punished during the interview, obviously I am going to correct it.

Both teachers and students might be highly selective in ESL learning while trying to pass the exam.

ESL Learning outside of the Classroom

Older adults tended to be isolated from mainstream community in society (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007; Wang, 1999), so they had limited opportunities to learn English outside of the classroom. Except Ms. Chen who lived with her American husband, the student participants had very limited ESL learning resources in their communities. As Wang (1999) pointed out, one of the major complaints from both younger and older adult immigrants in her study is that they do not have the

“environment” to study English. The participants in this study were retired. Some other students at the center were not required to speak English at work. Mrs. Wong lived in a senior apartment. Even though she lived among a diverse population of seniors, she only communicated with Chinese and Russian immigrants. She said: “many of the seniors stays at their home and watched TV, I mainly talks with Chinese. I learned Russian when I was young, so I sometimes sing songs with Russian neighbors.” Even though the apartment was a diverse community, Ms. Wong only stayed with the same group that she could communicate with. She ended up with people who spoke a language that she already knew. Mr. Kuo also mentioned: “my friends are Chinese or Taiwanese because I go to the Chinese church.” Mr. Lin also stated that he did not have English-speaking friends except English teachers at PCCC. Three out of four student participants communicated almost exclusively in Chinese outside of the ESL classrooms.

Older adult immigrants might have a social network mostly within their family setting (either speak English or not). Ms. Chen seemed to have ample opportunities to use English within her family setting. Her husband, stepchildren, and the international students spoke English. Ms. Chen spoke only English at home. She told me that her husband did not want her to study English at PCCC because “everybody speaks Chinese there.” Ms. Wong also spoke English with her granddaughter. However, the participants who spoke English with family members still had limited opportunities communicating with English speakers outside of the family setting.

Isolation from the Mainstream Community

Compared to younger immigrants, the participants were isolated from the mainstream community. One of the main reasons was the language barrier. According to

various studies, language is the main barrier for immigrants who are either minimum wage laborers or professional elites (Olsen, 1997; Portes & Rumbaut, 1990; Zhou, 1992). English was a barrier for these student immigrants and stopped them from moving into the mainstream community. The participants did not speak much English, so they had very limited opportunities for exposure to the mainstream community through media or their daily social environment. For example, Mr. Lin talked about how he liked watching the news. However, he mostly watched the news everyday in Chinese which mainly covered events in China or Taiwan.

For example Jeff explains that: About a month or two ago, there were six people shot in a café in the university district. I found out at noon (on the day of the shooting). However, the next day I came into class and none of my students knew about the shooting. It was peculiar because it was all over the news...everyone here was so scared about the shooter because he hasn't been apprehended yet. The students really didn't know anything about it.

In Jeff's class (around 10-15 students), none of the students knew about this incident. Therefore, it was clear that a majority of the students in the program rarely watched news in English.

The participants can learn about news from community Chinese newspapers. The 2012 U.S. general election took place during my observation period, and many students expressed worries about the result of the election. They felt the result might make an impact on their chance to naturalize. Even though they did not watch much English news, they still were talking about the election. In addition, they were familiar with issues such as social welfare change and medical reforms. Students still can receive

information from other Chinese-speaking immigrants or Chinese community newspapers.

Isolation from the mainstream community was mostly because of the language barrier, especially for participants who did not attend work or school settings in the U.S. This was explained by Mr. Kuo, who did not have any friends who were English speakers. In his church, about half of the people were Chinese speakers and the other half were English speakers. The church encouraged the Chinese speakers to interact with the English speakers, but Mr. Kuo usually socialized with other Chinese speakers. He was afraid of speaking English, but he knew that practicing English was important. His wife worked at a college cafeteria, and she spoke English at work. She progressed more quickly than Mr. Kuo did. Mr. Kuo even mentioned that, “I still want to reach out and make friends, but there are not so many opportunities.” It is clear that Mr. Kuo wanted to reach out and there were opportunities, for example, at the church setting. He did not reach out because he was afraid of speaking English. In contrast, his wife who worked in a cafeteria at a community college had to use English with her co-workers and she showed more progress. Furthermore, Mr. Kuo was not pressured to reach out to other ethnic groups. In contrast, immigrants in work and school settings had to reach out to other ethnic groups to survive. The settings were crucial to the participants. Immigrants in school and work settings might have to work closely with native English speakers. In contrast, in church or community center settings, there are fewer incentives to reach out and speak English. As Peirce (1995) summarizes, language learning cannot be separated from the social context. It is important to distinguish the amount of access to English speakers with various social settings. This study argues that in social settings in which

students are required to learn and use English, the students might progress more quickly and effectively than students in certain social settings in which they have access to English speakers but fail to utilize the use of English.

Keeping Their Own Identities

Based on my observations, many older adult Chinese students keep on their own identities. For many Chinese-speaking immigrants, their names were written incorrectly on their Green Cards. Most Chinese names have three words usually one word for the last name and two words for first name. However, when they entered the U.S., the second word of their first name usually became their middle name. Older adult immigrants asked their teachers about how to change their names back because they did not want a middle name. In addition, immigrants have the option of changing their names on the Naturalization Certificate. Based on my observations, older adult students did not want to change their names. On the contrary, younger students often requested the procedure on how to change to an Anglophone first name, so their co-workers or friends could remember their names. Older adults might have fewer incentives to change their first name because they have fewer opportunities to communicate with English speakers. It responds to Norton's investment model in that identities cannot be understood without the social context. Both examples showed that older adult Chinese immigrants valued their Chinese names and identities.

Chinese and Taiwanese Identities in ESL Learning

Unlike the generation of their children, older adult immigrants from China did not study English in their youth. Ms. Wong studied Russian when she was in school. She began her study of English after arriving in the U.S. Because of the Chinese Cultural

Revolution and other political movements, the participants from China did not learn English in K-12 settings. In fact, based on my conversation with students in the naturalization program, simply speaking English during that period might have been considered “anti-revolutionary” and resulted in being sent to a labor camp. As a result, most of the older students from China came to the U.S. without any English comprehension.

On the other hand, immigrants from Taiwan usually attended English class at middle school. Mr. Kuo studied English during secondary school in Taiwan. According to Mr. Kuo, the English lessons focused heavily on reading and writing, and he did not have opportunities to communicate with classmates in English during the class. After he came to the U.S., he forgot most of the language and felt he had to start from the beginning. However, based on my classroom observation, students from Taiwan had a better grasp of reading and writing English comprehension. Their primary English education that took place many years ago may have contributed to their success.

Cantonese and Mandarin-Speaking Identities in ESL Learning

Most early immigrants to the U.S. were from Canton and spoke Cantonese as their first language (Zhou, 1992). At PCCC, about half of the students in the program were Cantonese speakers who were mostly from the Canton province. According to Ms. Wong, who was the only Cantonese speaker in this research study, Cantonese speakers had a harder time pronouncing English. She told me that her friends who were from Canton had a lower English proficiency than people from other parts of China. Based on the informal conversations with the students in the program, there were several other Cantonese speakers, who had similar opinions. Based on my observations, many

Cantonese speakers had more difficulty learning English. Indeed, language learning happens in social contexts. Social factors cannot be overlooked for successful language learning (Norton, 1995). The main reason might be that the instructions are mostly in English and Mandarin. Cantonese speakers might have a harder time following and understanding the instructions. Classes that are bilingual in English and Cantonese could be a solution. In addition, previous education level could be another factor. Based on my observations, Mandarin speakers had higher previous education levels than Cantonese speakers. However, previous education level did not mean better English comprehension because ESL education was not allowed during the older adult Chinese immigrants' primary education days.

The difference between proficiency levels could be more than English comprehension. Mr. Lin, who was a Mandarin speaker, expressed that Cantonese speakers had a much harder time with pronunciation. He also stated that Cantonese speakers "have bad manners in the classroom; they like chatting during the class." Mandarin and Cantonese speakers formed different groups. Language identities can divide into different sub-groups among Chinese-speaking immigrants.

Political Identities

Communist identity. Political identities can hinder Chinese immigrants from feeling accepted in the U.S. and from the beginning of the naturalization procedure. On the naturalization form, there was a question which asking: "are you a member of a communist party?" which is listed along side with "are you a member of a terrorist organization?" All three Chinese participants did not identify themselves as members of the communist party. However, because China is ruled by the Chinese Communist

Party, I observed that some Chinese participants felt that Chinese nationals are not welcome in the U.S. because of the question on the naturalization form.

On the other hand, The Chinese Cultural Revolution had a very deep impact on Chinese immigrants, and it influenced some participants' decision to leave China. This event affected their ESL learning and their decision to naturalize. Macfarquhar and Schoenhals (2006) stated that "The Cultural Revolution which lasted from May 1966 to October 1976 was responsible for the most severe setback and the heaviest losses suffered by the Party, the state and the people since the founding of the People's Republic" (Macfarquhar & Schoenhals, 2006, p.3). During the Chinese Cultural Revolution, people were persecuted for various reasons. Ms. Chen talked about how she wanted to come to the U.S. because her father was killed during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. She talked about her father and how she was affected by the tragedy of losing her father. She states: "I didn't know what happened to my father for a long time. In the end, I got my father's files ...He was anti-revolutionary." What happened in China made her want to come to the U.S. because America is a free country. One of the reasons that Ms. Chen came to the U.S. and naturalized was because of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. This event made her distance herself from China and the Chinese government.

Mr. Lin and Ms. Wong also experienced the Chinese Cultural Revolution. However, both participants did not answer my interview questions related to politics or the Chinese Cultural Revolution. According to Mr. Lin, his school only taught Russian and did not teach English. As a result, he faced a language barrier after coming to the

U.S. Ms. Wong told me that she would not like to have any contacts with any political party in China or America.

Both participants' political identities might hinder them in trusting the government or participating in political activities, such as voting or running for office. During the interviews, two participants asked me if I would give the information from my research data collection to the immigration office. Their suspicions might be from their experiences in China. In fact, based on the interviews with the participants, during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Chinese people were forced to spy on their neighbors and tip off any suspicious information to the authorities. The participants could have been worried that similar things happen in the U.S. I assured my participants several times that I would never leak the information to my supervisor at the center or to the immigration office. The Chinese Cultural Revolution made older adult Chinese immigrants distrust the government and each other. They might feel that anyone can leak their personal information to the government, and that the government would use the information against them. In the end, these immigrants might only want to mind their own business. Their attitude might hinder them in reaching out to Chinese or non-Chinese ethnic groups.

Racial and cultural identity. These participants have had the experience of being discriminated against because of their English comprehension, immigrant status, or nationality. Ms. Wong described her inability to communicate with the apartment manager, and how the manager asked her to move out because she stayed at her daughter's apartment too often. Ms. Wong thought that the manager did this because she does not speak English. Ms. Wong felt that some American neighbors in her apartment

did not like immigrants because “they think we use their space at the apartment!” Ms. Chen’s husband rented rooms in their home out to international students, mostly from China and Japan. According to Ms. Chen, her husband treated Japanese students better than Chinese students. Her husband fought in World War II in Japan, spoke Japanese and believed that Japanese students were better behaved. She felt upset and sometimes fought with her husband. She said that all of the students in the house should be treated the same. These experiences of the students might hinder them from reaching out to other ethnic groups.

On the other hand, some participants might also be biased towards other races and nationalities. Several participants defined Americans as White and native English speakers. With this definition, they excluded themselves as Americans. Every time a student passed or failed the citizenship test, he or she often came back to the center and shared their experience with other classmates. Their classmates always asked them the question; “what does the interview officer look like?” Based on my interviews and observations, many students believed that the interviewers’ race and nationality made a difference on their test results. They did not want to meet non-White officials, including Asians. Mr. Kuo claimed that Asian officials had to be strict because “they have to deal with racism themselves.” Our students felt that “American” officers were the nicest ones and many students at the center hoped to have an “American” officer. In my opinion, this phenomenon showed that the participants were very isolated from the mainstream community. Without participating in today’s diverse populations within school or work settings, they could only learn the information from other Chinese speaking immigrants, and many of them still had very narrow views towards other races and ethnic groups.

Student and classmate identity. The classroom was an important social setting for the participants in this study. Students cared about their relationships with other students and the teachers. They were making new friends and forming new connections in the classroom. Students showed interest in the teachers by talking among themselves about their teachers and making comments about them. When they talked about Larry, Ms. Chen stated: “Larry did very well. He understands us all. He works very well; Larry’s Chinese is pretty good and can communicate with us.” Ms. Chen’s comments showed she appreciated that teachers can communicate with her in Chinese. Mr. Lin also stated: “Larry really wants us succeed; his pronunciation was like a TV anchor. Every syllable was so clear. I will always remember Larry- the American teacher who taught us English.” Mr. Lin’s comments showed that he praised Larry for his passion in teaching and English pronunciation. The teacher was often the first English speaker whom the participants communicated with in depth. The students were often very excited about practicing English with the teacher. It was through the English teacher that many students saw the U.S. beyond the Chinese community.

The participants treated their teachers liked family members or friends. They showed their respect to the teachers by giving them gifts, mostly food items, but sometimes they also gave a necklace or other more valuable items. Jeff stated that his students occasionally gave him small food items. Sometimes students asked their teachers to go out for lunch or invited the teachers to their homes. Compared with the younger generation, the older adult students at the center tried to maintain a close relationship with their teachers.

The participants tried to give feedback to their teachers to improve their class. Some students would ask their teachers to speak Chinese. They liked to communicate freely with the teachers and asked them questions anytime they wanted. In fact, they eagerly gave feedback and Jeff mentioned that sometimes he could not hear his own voice because many of the students would speak at the same time. Compared to the stereotypical Asian students who were categorized as quiet and passive (Ellwood & Nakane, 2009), the students at the center were certainly the opposite. One of the reasons might be the students' ages. The students were usually much older than the teachers, and the teachers usually called their students by last name, for example, Mr. Wang. On the contrary, students usually called their teachers by their first names. Mr. Lin stated that one of his teachers was the same age as his grandson. He said: "He is like my grandchild, but he is playing the role as my teacher." The participants might treat their teachers like family members and feel the teachers were like their sons and daughters. Therefore, compared to traditional age students, this population might be more willingly to communicate with their teachers beyond ESL or citizenship classes.

Teachers might need to be more patient with this population. In addition, they should be firm with the students in discipline and focused on their lesson plans. Students might ask irrelevant questions during class and demand answers immediately. Indeed, the class might easily become disoriented and it is up to the teachers to bring the focus back to the subject. Older adult students might have behavior problems similar to teenager students. I found that it was quite often the students talked on the phone, chatted, or even argued with classmates during class.

Student participants had multiple identities in the ESL classroom. They were much older than their ESL teachers, and aside from being students, their identities in the classroom often simulated being family members. Their real family members might be too busy to spend time with them. Therefore, the participants' relationships with their teachers were important to them. They considered the teachers to be their family members, and they took care of the teachers by giving feedback, advice, and sometimes gifts such as food items to show their appreciation.

For older adults, socializing with other students might be as important as their ESL learning. Students were guessing and trying to understand what the teacher said by code switching between Chinese and English to help each other. The students asked and gave advice to each other quite often in Chinese, while the teacher talked in English. According to Jeff, part of the difficulties in teaching this group was that students would talk among themselves and it was hard to ask them to be quiet. However, Jeff admitted that it might be beneficial to the students because they clearly talked about the naturalization content. Based on my observations, the students in the center were interacting with each other frequently in the classroom, which included correcting others' mistakes or giving others hints about answers. Research shows that when people grow older, the social relationship functions shift away from informational purposes toward emotional regulatory functions (Cartensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999, as cited at Mast, Zimmerman, and Rowe, 2009). I noticed that students chatted with each other after class quite often. Compared with younger students, I sense that older adult students think the classroom is a place for learning as well as a place for social interaction. Among the participants I observed, I found them to be friends who took the test

together. The classroom was perhaps both the main and only setting where they socialized with both Chinese and English speakers.

Summary

In the political perspective, the nationality of the participants was a factor in their commitment to naturalization and influenced their experience living in the U.S. In looking at language perspective, the first language of the participants was found to possibly influence their ESL learning. Cantonese-speaking students might be more vulnerable to mistakes and need more attention from researchers and educators. In the classroom perspective, participants' identities as students and classmates made their ESL learning different from traditionally aged ESL students. The participants' close relationships with teachers and other classmates made the classroom possibly the most important social setting in their daily lives.

Naturalization Exam and ESL Learning for older adult Chinese-Speaking Immigrants

Introduction

Why do older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants want to naturalize? How do they prepare for the naturalization test in English? This qualitative research tries to answer both questions by observing classes, interviewing older adult students, volunteer teachers and analyzing documents of an ESL/Naturalization program at PCCC in the Northwest. This chapter focuses on the experience of both student and teacher participants. First, the author presents an overview of the naturalization program at PCCC. Secondly, the author examines their preparation for the naturalization exam in English, following the experiences of the immigrants and the reasons they want to naturalize. In the end, the author argues that student participants' decisions to learn English and naturalize are related to their identities, such as nationality, financial and family situations.

Naturalization Program at PCCC

PCCC had three classrooms. There were eight tables in the classrooms and two chairs for each table. Students usually sat with the same classmates but they could choose to sit with different classmates if they preferred. Students listened intensively and responded with a series of questions to the teacher. I noticed there were usually more female students than male students. In one of the classes I observed, there were 11 female students and only five male students. Based on the informal conversation with the students, husbands often have to work full time and cannot attend the classes. On

many occasions, wives naturalized first and husbands either naturalized later or stayed as permanent residents.

The students were not quiet in the classroom. They switched back and forth between Chinese and English. Students were very interested in what the teacher said. They talked with others in Chinese to make sure they understood their teacher. They also made comments constantly. For example, if one student answered the teacher's question promptly, others might comment: "She must study very hard at home" or "What is your trick to memorize these sentences?" The class was usually conducted in English for English-speaking teachers and in Chinese for Chinese-speaking teachers. About half of the students' first language was Mandarin, and the other half spoke Cantonese and limited Mandarin. Sometimes students translated what the teacher said from English to Mandarin and from Mandarin to Cantonese. The classrooms were noisy, often with English, Mandarin, and Cantonese spoken at the same time.

Many of the students in the ESL/Naturalization program at PCCC were in their 60s or older. Mr. Lin, one of the older adult student participants, was surprised when he walked in the classroom for the first time. "I found most of the students are over 60 years old, and some are even around 80 years old." Indeed, it is not uncommon for students at PCCC to start learning English at an older adult stage.

Older adult students in the program mostly were retired. They lived in senior housing alone or with their spouse. Others might work at health/care centers or restaurants. Many of them lived far away from PCCC and spent one to two hours per round trip traveling to and from the center. They had to work, take care of their families, and spend time taking a bus to PCCC to learn naturalization content in English. Based

on my conversation with the students at PCCC, many of them were so busy that they did not have time for studying at home. According to Mr. Wu, one of the volunteer teacher participants, some of his students hurried in to the class after work. Some of them had to leave immediately after the class to work. One of his students got off work at 2am but still attended the 9:30am class.

Naturalization Exam and Preparation

Immigrants who wish to naturalize must pass the naturalization exam. Although there are some exceptions, most immigrants must take the exam in English (USCIS, 2012). The exam includes testing applicants' personal information, U.S. history, and U.S. government, using both an oral interview and a writing test. The vocabulary in the naturalization content could be difficult, with uncommon words such as "alimony, allegiance, and habitual drunkard" (USCIS, 2012). Students might have to explain these words during the interviews. Based on my observation, students had difficulties understanding words such as "marital status" or "address". Even in advanced classes, the vocabulary in the naturalization content might take the students one or two years to memorize and understand. According to Ms. Chen, "there are many vocabulary in naturalization test, and I cannot answer if I don't understand the questions." In addition, students were required to have basic English communication skills because naturalization officers could ask questions they thought were appropriate to test the students' ESL abilities.

The naturalization exam was very stressful for the participants but also influential to their ESL learning. Preparing for the exam gave the students the chance to get out of their comfort zone and to work on their English. They knew that it was a

learning opportunity about U.S. society and English. According to Ms. Chen, “for the naturalization exam, the contents are also useful. When I enter U.S., I can understand the words because I have gone through the N-400 forms.” Ms. Chen stated that the naturalization content was useful. She knew all the words the border patrol asked her when she entered the U.S. from Canada. According to Ms. Wong, “The test forces us to study English. Maybe we needed the pressure before taking the test.” Ms. Wong studied English in other senior centers or churches, but she did not do as well. The reason might be that she did not have to pass the naturalization interview at that time. Beyond preparing for the test, some students were becoming interested in learning English for daily life. According to Mr. Lin, “I want to actually learn something, not just pass the interview.” Mr. Kuo still came to PCCC to study ESL regularly after passing the test. It showed he wanted to make his daily life more convenient, so he kept going to ESL classes. The naturalization test inspired many older adult immigrant participants to start studying English.

Preparing for the naturalization interview might also change participants’ learning strategies and identities. According to Norton’s investment model, a learner’s ESL learning is highly related to his/her identity. Ms. Wong failed the exam twice. She used to focus on memorization of the content. Now, she decided to take her time learning English and understanding the content. She also stated that she wanted to talk with English speakers. After failing twice, she realized that memorization and studying alone did not work. She changed her learning methods and thinking about integrating into the community. Ms. Wong’s focus on daily life English showed that she wanted to

integrate into the mainstream community. In short, she changed her identity from an outsider to a participant of the mainstream society because of the naturalization test.

Experience of Immigrants and Naturalization

From a social perspective, Mr. Kuo and Mr. Lin had very limited interaction with English speakers. When asked about “What do you do in your free time?” the most common answer was studying English or watching TV. Both participants also stated that they read a Chinese newspaper daily. According to Su and Conaway (1995), the most helpful source in finding information is the Chinese community newspaper for Chinese immigrants in the U.S. The Chinese newspaper seems to be an important source for immigrants to know about news either in the Chinese community or outside of the Chinese community. Even though they did not have full time jobs or did not go to school full time, they might still have a busy schedule. According to Mr. Kuo, he shopped at Chinese supermarkets. He went shopping there every other day. It was also an exercise for him. Taking long walks, gardening and going to supermarkets were his main activities and hobbies. Mr. Kuo mostly watched local weather forecast when he watched English news. Mr. Lin’s daily activities included watching Chinese and Taiwanese news, exercising at the apartment gym, and writing articles. His articles could be seen in local community newspapers. The topics often related to current Chinese news or local Chinese communities. He also wrote articles on his own websites. Both participants’ daily activities were mostly by themselves and did not require them to speak English.

Ms. Wong and Ms. Chen were the caregivers of the family and had more opportunities to speak English than the other two participants. Ms. Wong took care of

her grandchild while her daughter was at work. Even though Ms. Wong did not work, sometimes she was still too busy to study for the naturalization exam. Ms. Wong talked with her grandchildren in English. Her grandchildren taught her naturalization content. Ms. Chen's husband was over 80 years old. She took care of her husband and the international students at home. She also took care of the pets. Both participants only spoke English to the people whom they took care of. It showed their social network was quite limited.

Immigration experience. Most recent Chinese-speaking immigrants had been family-sponsored immigrants. About 75% were admitted as immediate family members, including spouse, unmarried children, and parents (Zhou & Gatewood, 2000). Ms. Chen came to the U.S. because she married a U.S. citizen. Mr. Kuo came to the U.S. because his sibling sponsored him. Ms. Wong and Mr. Lin came to the U.S. because their children sponsored them. None of the participants came to the U.S. because of an occupation.

Reason to naturalize. The student participants intended to naturalize for various reasons. All four students participated at the ESL program to prepare for their naturalization exams. All four participants were self-motivated. Students in this program intended to learn English and naturalize. Why did older adult immigrants want to naturalize even if it might be so difficult for them? Every participant had his or her reasons to naturalize. According to Ms. Wong, she could not go traveling with her friends because she did not carry a U.S. passport. Some immigrants might naturalize because they needed to take care of their family members. Ms. Wong's daughter was a single mother. Ms. Wong had to take care of her granddaughter while her daughter was

at work. She wanted to go back to China but was worried her daughter could not take care of herself and her daughter. She chose to become a citizen to be with her family. In addition, Ms. Wong did not have a job or savings so she had to apply for federal assistance. As a U.S. citizen, she would be able to apply for certain benefits. Some participants tried to naturalize because they did not have close relatives or contacts in China anymore. Ms. Chen stated that she had only one daughter who lived in Canada. Her husband was an American. She did not have frequent contact with relatives in China. She only went back to China twice in the past seven years. According to Mr. Lin, there were mainly two reasons that older adults here want to naturalize. First, they want to sponsor their children to come here. Second, they want to apply for public assistance. In addition, Mr. Lin stated: “if you stay here, you want to feel that you belong here.” From the teacher’s point of view, Justin stated that students at PCCC wanted to naturalize because: “a lot of them want to vote, have U.S. passports, and have more freedom. America is free, and they love America. They seem to have a lot of patriotism toward their new homeland.” Students and teachers could have quite different perspectives. It showed that there were various and multiple reasons to naturalize. Students might try to present more “appropriate” answers when asked by teachers or USCIS officers.

Chinese immigrants may not naturalize if they have significant family or financial ties in China. Mr. Kuo, Ms. Chen, and Ms. Wong applied for naturalization, while Mr. Lin was still not certain. Some students at PCCC were hesitant to naturalize because China did not allow dual citizenship. Therefore, once Chinese citizens naturalized, they were not able to enter China without a visa or receive pensions from

the Chinese government. For example, Mr. Lin was still hesitant about applying for the U.S. citizenship because “If I become an U.S. citizen, my registration in China and insurance might be cancelled.” Mr. Lin might lose his pension after he naturalizes, so the benefits of naturalization are smaller than the negative consequences.

Taiwanese immigrants might still naturalize even if they have family or financial ties in Taiwan because Taiwan allows dual citizenship. Mr. Kuo still had an apartment in Taipei and he did not want to sell it because he wanted to have a place to stay once he returns to Taiwan. Mr. Kuo did not worry about losing his identity as a Taiwanese citizen. In contrast to Chinese immigrants, he might feel the transition was smooth. He could still go back to Taiwan using his Taiwanese passport. In fact, he was considering returning to Taiwan after naturalization for medical reasons; according to Mr. Kuo, the medical care was a serious issue. He said: “Now I don’t have any health insurance. I bring a lot of medicine back to the U.S. I can’t get sick. My wife also doesn’t have any health insurance.” He also stated that Taiwan had universal insurance and he and his wife might move back to Taiwan after naturalization for medical care. Taiwanese immigrants might feel that Taiwan and U.S. identities coexist because they could move back and forth between two countries.

Summary

Participants came to PCCC to prepare for the naturalization exam in English. Each participant has his or her own reasons whether to naturalize or not. Reasons could be numerous. Most immigrants from China and Taiwan felt more secure once they became U.S. citizens because they could receive federal assistance, including health insurance if they met certain requirements. In addition, they could sponsor their family

to come to the U.S. They also felt they were not foreigners anymore. Carrying a U.S. passport and being able to vote were also important.

Their decision seemed to relate to their identities, such as their nationality, financial situation, family ties and a sense of belonging toward U.S. In order to naturalize, the participants were required to learn English. The finding showed that this population had a harder time learning English because of isolation from the mainstream community. In the next chapter I will discuss another significant factor regarding this population's ESL learning: aging.

Older Adult Cognitive Development

Introduction

This chapter focuses on how aging affects ESL learning. According to Su and Conaway (1995), older adults are the newest and most influential minority group in the U.S. Older adult Chinese immigrants are highly motivated to learn English. Nearly half of the participants in Su and Conaway's study (1995) cited learning English as their most needed goal in the educational information category. Cheung found that some of the most significant problems among elderly Chinese immigrants are language and communication issues (Cheung, 1989, as cited in Su & Conaway, 1995). Therefore, the older adult Chinese-speaking community requires information on ESL learning strategies that can accommodate their needs.

However, the literature has seldom paid attention to older adult L2 learners. The literature in SLA has not yet developed a complete theory of how aging affects second language acquisition. Although previous quantitative research shows that older adults progress more slowly in ESL learning than younger adults, the reasons are still not clear (Long, 1996; Wang, 1999).

This study, on the other hand, explores the relationship between aging and SLA from both cognitive and sociocultural perspectives. This research shows there is a combination of reasons that contribute to the challenges of this population's ESL learning. For example, the student participants in this study experienced issues including memory loss, decreases in processing speed, pronunciation and listening comprehension difficulties, and being obsessed with details in their ESL learning. In addition, the student participants identified social and cultural barriers such as health concerns

because of stress arising from ineffective ESL learning strategies, pressure to pass the citizenship test, inexperience in using technology, and lack of confidence.

Overview

There are conflicting opinions on whether a student's age has an influence on his/her learning experience of naturalization content. According to Mast, Zimmerman, and Rowe (2009), both age-related brain changes and the learning activities of older adults are still mostly unclear according to this empirical investigation. During the interviews with the volunteer teachers, they had different opinions on how the student's age plays an important role in preparing for the naturalization test. According to Larry, younger students sometimes progressed more than older students and vice versa. It all depended on how much they studied. Larry claimed: "From what I see, age does not make a difference on this set of individuals." Also, Jeff stated: "I guess it all depends on their level of previous experience with English. Age is not an issue." Justin also noticed, "I feel older adults seemed to [be] more likely to state [or] to offer what you can change, asserting their opinions." Older adult students in his class improved after 6 months. They spoke more fluently. Their pronunciation improved. In contrast, in a study conducted by Service and Craik (1993), older adults were found to be slower than younger adults in learning foreign languages. Wang's findings (1999) showed that Chinese women immigrants, whose age of arrival was 40 to 55, had a harder time in English listening and pronunciation than their classmates, whose age of arrival was 25 to 35. Both findings also indicated that the ability to learn a L2 declines as learners' ages increased in adulthood. During my interview with the volunteer teacher, Mr. Wu, he stated that the older adult students' memories were not as good as the younger ones. He

advised his older students to spend more time preparing for the naturalization test. However, he felt that the main difference was not the memory or other cognitive development issues, but was that they did not learn English at K-12 school settings.

The conflicting opinions show that there are various reasons in aging and ESL learning beyond older adults' cognitive development. However, the previous quantitative research did not take these factors into account. Therefore, this qualitative research is important because we can examine aging and ESL learning from both cognitive and sociocultural perspectives.

Aging and ESL learning

Memory loss and processing speed. All student participants felt that memory loss was an issue. Ms. Wong explained this by stating: "I can't remember much at all, and I am afraid talking to others [in English]." Mr. Kuo added that: "My memory is not good. Whatever I studied for today, I will forget tomorrow. I study every day, but the result is not very good." According to Mr. Kuo and Ms. Wong, "My memory in daily life is bad, but in studying English is worse." However, research shows that older adult students' decrease in processing speed, instead of memory loss, might be more significant in their L2 learning. According to Mast, Zimmerman, and Rowe (2009), the possibility that learning will be affected by age is great because learning relies on multiple cognitive abilities, and declines in any ability could cause an impact on learning itself. A person's general pattern of verbal memory, verbal ability, and numeric ability usually remains stable until their 70s or 80s. However, a person's processing has been found to show regular decline starting in middle adulthood (Mast, Zimmerman, and Rowe, 2009). Therefore, the issue might not be the memory loss, but the processing

speed of the participants. Participants might not have enough time to understand the content. A study by Service and Craik showed that (1993), when learning new vocabulary, all the participants tried to think of connections between familiar vocabulary and the new words, but the older participants often failed to do so. Keeping a slow pace and using enough reviewing activities might be crucial to this population. Mr. Lin stated that older adult students have to spend more time studying English than younger people. Mr. Wu also said: “learning English is like a cooking process. We need to cook the language gradually. Only when enough effort is spent can we cook it well.” This information could be useful for administrators and ESL teachers and help in designing curriculum for older adult learners.

Not only the teachers should know this idea, but also educators can let the students know by discussing how this information can help students adjust their learning process. For example, by allowing enough time for students to attain the knowledge, this would increase their confidence because they know that they can still learn new things.

Health issues. Health issues, including both psychological and physical health, might hinder this population from learning English and preparing for the naturalization test. Based on my classroom observation, many of the students at PCCC had some minor health concerns, such as hearing loss and eye issues. They often asked teachers to speak louder and write larger on the board. Some students had more serious illnesses, such as high blood pressure. For example, Mr. Lin had high blood pressure. His daughter did not want him to study because she feared for his well-being. Ms. Wong also had some health concerns (nose problems and headaches), so she had to take a break before re-

taking the test. Teachers should be sensitive and aware of their students' discomfort in the classroom.

This population should be aware of the possible drawbacks of extensive ESL learning. Several older adult students encountered health concerns during their preparation for the naturalization exam. Mr. Lin talked about another classmate who studied at the center, and passed away because of high blood pressure. He thought it might be related to the preparation for the naturalization test, and felt older people should be aware of their health conditions while learning English. Based on my conversations with the participants, the anxiety toward the naturalization exam could be unbearable. One of the common complaints was that many participants had trouble sleeping at night. According to Ms. Wong, her daughter reminded her to be careful while learning English at PCCC because older people might have chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes. According to Mr. Lin, after learning English, he started having headaches and he thought it was because of studying English. At the beginning of the class, Mr. Lin felt his classmates all seemed to be healthy, however, after a period of time, many of them looked older. He thought that this might be due to the pressure of learning the naturalization content in English. Preparing for the exam could have been a burden for the participants because they were generally nervous about the upcoming exam and very anxious about not passing the test. To help this, teachers could assure the students that they can keep taking the test until they pass the test. In addition, arranging outreach activities for immigrants to engage in conversation with USCIS officials or organizing tours to visit USCIS field offices before the exam

might be helpful. If students could talk to USCIS officers before taking the test, they might be less anxious while preparing for it.

Issue of technology usage. Technology was important for the older adult students to learn English and their abilities varied greatly. Ms. Wong could not use computers, Mr. Lin and Mr. Kuo used computers daily, and Mr. Chen used electronic dictionaries daily. According to Ms. Wong, she had a computer, but she did not know how to use it and her family was too busy to teach her. During the interview, I tried to explain to Ms. Wong how to use the computer to look up words' meanings and pronunciations. However, at the follow up interview, Ms. Wong still had not used a computer for ESL learning. According to Ms. Chen, she carried an electronic dictionary with her every day. She looked words up whenever she encountered a word she didn't recognize. She said: "Sometime I use it when I talk with my husband." Jeff also mentioned that all of the students used electronic dictionaries in his class. It might be surprising that Mr. Lin and Ms. Chen, among many older adult students, heavily relied on computers and electronic dictionaries to learn English and prepare for the test. It was equally surprising that no student in Larry's class used a traditional dictionary. Based on the interviews with students, students also stated that looking up words in print dictionaries took too much time. It might be that the font in the dictionaries was too small, and the process was time consuming.

While many older adults used computers and electronic dictionaries to learn English, there were still some of students that had not learned how to use computers. To address this problem, administrators could design classes that integrate ESL class and computer class in computer labs. Older adult students could access more information

and resources from the mainstream community if they had a basic understanding of English and computer skills.

Pronunciation issue. There are conflicting opinions about age and pronunciation based on my interviews. According to Mr. Wu, he had to speak louder when teaching older adult students. In addition, he often corrected their pronunciation multiple times before any minor improvement occurred. In contrast, Justin stated that pronunciation is generally difficult for English learners regardless of their age. For example, all of his students had difficulties distinguishing “R”&”L.” According to Larry, “they tend to add on another vowel on the end of word. Like saying ‘*electa*’ instead of *elect*. I am not sure why, and I try to get them not to do that.” From the students’ perspective, Mr. Kuo stated: “Listening and speaking are the most difficult parts for me.” Ms. Chen added, “my ear wasn’t very good. My daughter told me I couldn’t learn certain words.” Even though the teachers had different opinions regarding the relation between age and pronunciation, all four student participants felt they had a harder time with pronunciation. Based on my observation, pronunciation can be very hard for some participants. Some students had difficulties saying, “I like America.” Some students had difficulties distinguishing *weather* and *winter*. Their lack of previous ESL learning experience might be significant because research shows that pronunciation can be highly correlated with age (Long, 1996).

The literature in SLA seems to agree that generally the younger the students are, the better their pronunciation is (Ellis, 1998; Long, 1996). Service and Craik (1993) also suggest that learning pronunciation requires learners’ short-term memory, which decreases significantly after middle age. Their pronunciation might hinder them in

gaining naturalization. One teaching implication is that educators could arrange pronunciation classes which are specific to Chinese-speaking immigrants, focusing on pronunciation like “R” and “L.”

Listening comprehension issues. Older Chinese-speaking immigrants might have difficulties with listening comprehension. During my classroom observations, I heard the students ask the teacher many times to speak slower or say the sentence again. Mr. Wu also mentioned that he had to speak slower when talking with older students. Despite living in the U.S. for at least four years, many of the participants were still not familiar with the manner and speed of native English speakers. Their decreasing hearing ability might be the issue.

The students’ extensive focus on naturalization content might be another issue. According to Larry, students knew the textbook very well and they could understand the content even when Larry spoke fast. However, if he asked students questions that were not in the textbook, the students usually could not understand them. One of the common reasons that the students at PCCC failed the naturalization exam was that they could not understand what the immigration officers said when they asked questions beyond the naturalization content. Both Ms. Wong and Ms. Chen failed the exam because they had a hard time understanding the interviewer’s questions. Even though they could not understand which questions they failed, they were sure that those questions were not from the textbooks. According to Ms. Wong, she worked very hard to memorize the naturalization content, but the interviewer asked a question outside of the naturalization content, such as a topic relating to her children or to her apartment. This showed the importance of knowing basic English that falls outside of the naturalization content.

Students tried very hard to learn the naturalization content, but focusing exclusively on the textbook was not sufficient in improving their English ability. In conclusion, I believe students will have difficulty understanding basic conversation questions.

Based on my observations, the students compensated for their limited listening comprehension by clarifying information with their classmates in the classrooms. The few advanced students translated and answered questions for others in the classroom. According to Justin, the students helped each other and the advanced students helped him translate English to Mandarin. When students had different opinions about answering a question, they might have argued openly during the class, even when the teacher wanted to move on. The classroom atmosphere could be intense at times, but mostly was very supportive and collaborative among the students.

The participants would have benefited from interaction with English speakers or including class material in their daily life vocabulary in order to improve their vocabulary and listening comprehension. Once, Larry told Mr. Lin: “you have good writing,” but Mr. Lin thought Larry asked him to read a sentence. Sometimes the students were just guessing what the teacher was saying. That was probably the reason so many students talked to each other in Chinese during class - they were trying to find out what the teacher was saying. I noticed that many students preferred guessing rather than asking teachers to clarify, even in Mr. Wu’s class to whom they could speak Chinese. Many students in the class had difficulties understanding the lectures. Therefore, they asked a few advanced classmates to translate for them. I did notice that few students tried to answer most of the questions, and most students were quiet and only spoke Chinese to each other to clarify their questions. In order to improve, students

need to learn how to ask for clarification. Educators could encourage students to ask more questions. Students need to understand that they will not be punished for not understanding the questions.

Issue of students' obsession involving vocabulary and pronunciation. I noticed that participants might get caught up with small details and could not move on. Larry mentioned: "I do notice that students will hang up on a spelling or an individual word. Sometimes they got caught up with a vowel, close "a" or open "a," they would be very concerned about the minor and tiny details." During the classroom observation, there were times that the whole class could not move on because students were arguing whether certain words needed to be capitalized or not. Both students and teachers' interviews showed that this population had a strong tendency to try to understand everything before moving on.

Students were found to be afraid that the interviewer would ask questions which they had not heard before, so they felt they had to prepare for as much vocabulary as possible. Some participants had very limited access to English speakers. The social network and learning opportunities outside of the classroom had an impact on my participants' view of ESL learning. Without exposure to native English speakers, they considered English as a subject instead of a communication tool. In other words, they might focus on certain infrequently used words or pronunciation because they felt they were compelled to study all the new vocabulary. As a result, they could not move on to more important concepts during class because they were still worried about memorizing the vocabulary and its pronunciation. However, when they interacted with non-Chinese speakers, it was certain that they would encounter new vocabulary or expressions. This

factor might hinder their interaction with English speakers or the ability to pass the naturalization exam because they might not be able to respond to questions they are unfamiliar with. English teachers can help beginning students understand which words are more frequently used in general conversation. For advanced students, asking students to watch movies or TV shows in English would be helpful in giving them authentic input.

Confidence issues. Lack of confidence was one of the main issues that student participants needed to face in ESL learning. According to Mr. Lin, “when I was young and heard someone who started to learn a foreign language in his/her 40s, I thought that must be a waste of time. Now my age is nearly doubled as those people and I come back to the class to learn English from the beginning.” Wang (1999) suggests that immigrant women with a later-age-of-arrival are less confident in ESL learning. Indeed, for many older adult learners at PCCC, they generally felt that older adults could not learn a new language. According to Justin, their lack of confidence in memorization seemed to be the biggest problem. He said: “In some cases, they seem not to be confident with their ability to learn. They said ‘I am stupid because I am old, so it’s hard for me to learn English.’ ” Ms. Chen also felt that she was not confident in learning English because “Chinese people have a harder time learning English because English and Chinese languages are very different.” Many participants felt that learning English at an older age was hard or nearly impossible because of their age or first language. Older adult students may be able to gain confidence by talking with English speakers. In addition, they can see the importance of communicative learning approach, which can boost their confidence and change their learning strategies.

This study does not find residential issues or career issues to be significant on the participants' identities or their ESL learning. Based on my observations, they mostly lived in isolation from the mainstream community. As a result, it did not matter if they lived in a Chinatown type area or in a suburban area. All four participants had not worked after coming to the U.S., so they did not experience any career downturn issues. However, it should be noted that they still might want to work. For example, Mr. Lin expressed interest in a teaching or writing career, but his options were limited to the Chinese-speaking communities.

Students' Coping Strategies

For most students in the program, they did not have any foundation of English before preparing for the naturalization test. Because of the lack of an English foundation, many students developed unorthodox learning methods that possibly hindered them from learning English and gaining citizenship. According to Mast, Zimmerman, and Rowe (2009), the decrease of abilities in memory, processing speed and executive functioning might force older adults to change their learning methods, settings and goals. Based on my observation with the class and data analysis, the students sometimes would write Chinese characters on their textbooks and incorrectly match these with the English pronunciation. However, the Chinese and English language pronunciations are very different and these notes only confuse students and teachers. Ms. Wong did not learn the English alphabet and its pronunciation at the beginning of her English studies and expresses this by saying; "I do not know Chinese pinyin or English alphabets. Sometimes I use Chinese characters to substitute for English pronunciation. It's not accurate." Even though she knew this method is not accurate, she

still used it to remind her of the pronunciation. This issue shows that the participants needed to learn the English alphabet and basic English pronunciation. Teaching students how to use electronic dictionaries and online resources might be helpful in assisting them to look up specific vocabulary words.

Memorization and repetition were the most common coping strategies for the participants overall. According to Mr. Wu, some students would write the sentences repeatedly to remember the content. Other students listened and read the sentences repeatedly to remember the content. Larry also supports this by saying, “well, I look at their books, similar to me, you can tell they are really reading this book, a lot of notes in their book, I think that’s the primary way they are learning is repetition.” In addition, Mr. Lin adds: “There are about 1000 vocabulary words and 500 sentences in naturalization exam. There was some difficult vocabulary, such as ‘allegiance’, ‘exclusion’, or ‘alimony.’ ” With very little English comprehension, the participants tried to memorize all the vocabulary and sentences. The common strategy was to listen to the audio tape consisting of questions and answers, and write the sentences over and over. Justin supports this by saying, “A lot of time I say something they will repeat. They repeat after me even if I didn’t ask.” Repetition was greatly emphasized, but understanding the content, on the other hand, was ignored by the students. However, repetition and memorization without understanding the content would make ESL learning difficult because the students would only be guessing the sentence meaning by the key words they have been taught. This learning method can also be problematic in the naturalization interview. For example, Ms. Wong failed the exam because of her listening comprehension and vocabulary level. The interviewer asked her “have you read

the instructions before you decide whether to change your name or not?” However, she only understood the word “weather” so she thought the question was “how is the weather today?” and she failed the exam. Based on my interview with her, she explained that she heard the word “weather” and ended up linking that to a possible question, but it was far from the correct one. Encouraging students to learn how to clarify questions would be important for this population. For example, a student could ask “Can you say it again?” or “Can you say it in another way?”

A memorization only strategy would make it hard for the participants to use and understand English. Ms. Wong talked about how her friends told her not to worry about understanding phrases, but only to memorize certain phrases. For example, when asked “how are you,” just answer “I am fine.” As a result, she might answer with phrases but not know what they mean. Ms. Wong also mentioned: “I didn’t learn English when I was young, so what I can do now is only to memorize [the naturalization content].” I suggested that Ms. Wong learn beginning English grammar and vocabulary. However, she felt that she did not have enough time to learn from the basic alphabet. She insisted on learning the naturalization content only. Ms. Wong said that she intended to pass the exam as soon as possible, so she focused only on the naturalization exam. As a result, she could only memorize the fixed questions and answers. Based on my classroom observations, not only Ms. Wong, but also many other students at PCCC had similar ideas. One teacher told the students “you may sit”, but no one moved. It turned out that the students could only understand “sit down”, not “you may sit.” The students might have had a very high level of English vocabulary but at the same time did not understand the basic phrases.

Some of the students might have thought that studying basic ESL content was a waste of time because the naturalization exam mainly focused on history and civics. One student in the program told me that if any question started with “have you ever...”, then the answer was no. In addition, the challenges and age of older adult students might be recognized at the naturalization test. How can students expect to pass the exam by these learning strategies? Many students believed that older age made it easier for them to pass. When USCIS officers visited PCCC during an outreach event, the officers shared with the students at PCCC that they would take into account the students’ ages and their health condition when evaluating their English ability. Ms. Wong exemplifies this by saying “I am not interested in languages. I hope the officer will give me a break because of my age, but it didn’t go well.” Ms. Wong said that some officers made it easier for older adult people but not for her. Based on my interviews with the participants who took the test, the policy was not clear and it varied depending on the individual interviewer. The policy might mislead some participants to feel that they could pass the exam without understanding the content.

Failing a naturalization test can affect student learning strategies, even shifting their identities. Ms. Wong talked about how after she failed the first exam, she wanted to give up. She said: “I failed the naturalization exam the first time and I didn’t want to study for 7 or 8 days. In China, I was a housewife and I didn’t go out much. I was a little scared when talking to the officers. I was sad because I don’t have foundation of English, so I only could memorize.” Ms. Wong used to have rigid and fixed ideas about learning English. However, she realized the disadvantages to this, and changed her learning strategies because of her test failing experience.

After failing twice, Ms. Wong changed her attitude. She mentioned that she would start working on beginning English grammar and vocabulary and later try to understand the naturalization content. Mr. Lin also had a more interactive way of learning English. According to Mr. Lin, “I observed people talk. My wife and I practice English together, too.” Although students memorized most of the naturalization exam content, they were still required to have a basic understanding of English grammar, speaking, and listening comprehension. Based on my observations, students who refused to work on the English foundation and solely depended on memorization had higher failing rates than the students who had a basic foundation of English comprehension. Even though memorization might be the primary model of learning within many Asian cultures, this strategy related to the learners’ lack of a foundation in English comprehension. The students were often not confident in learning English and felt it would take too long for them to build their foundational English. Instructors should ask students interview questions in different ways, so students can understand that they could not rely on memorizing the fixed questions or answers. Students should understand that questions can be asked in multiple ways. Administrators should advise students to take beginning English courses even though the students want to apply for naturalization. More beginning English classes before preparing for naturalization would be beneficial to many older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants.

Summary

Cognitive and sociocultural factors might be equally important in second language acquisition for this population. This research found that aging is not the only factor that hinders older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants’ ESL learning. Older adult

Chinese immigrants had multiple challenges in ESL learning, including their confidence in learning, their lack of previous learning experience, health issues related to the tests, and a lack of social settings that encouraged them to learn English. In addition, their learning strategies, which focused on memorization and repetition, could also hinder them from understanding the content and the way English is used on a daily life basis.

Educators can redesign the curriculum to include more repetitive activities, teaching the content at a slower pace, hosting more social activities and even encouraging the students to go back to school or to join the workforce. In addition, based on my observations, it was best to advise students, who lacked previous learning experience, to start learning the English alphabet and grammar, instead of simply memorizing the naturalization content.

Based on the findings of this study, I summarize the participants' learning experiences in the two tables. I include both tables here to help readers compare the four student and teacher participants.

Table 2**Overview of the Student Participants' ESL Learning**

	Focus of four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing)	Challenges of ESL learning	Opportunities	Technology	Learning strategies	Classroom behavior
Ms. Chen	Listening and speaking	1. Confidence 2. Memory	Plenty of opportunities	1. Computer 2. Electronic dictionary	1. Write; 2. Learn from family members	Active
Mr. Kuo	Listening and speaking	Memory	None; only talk with Chinese speakers	1. Computer 2. I-phone	Listen to the tape everyday	quiet
Ms. Wong	Listening and speaking	1. Memory 2. Afraid of speaking & pronunciation	Talk to her Granddaughter	None / don't know how to use computer	1. Listen to tape often; 2. Write	quiet
Mr. Lin	All	N/A	Talk with his wife (Chinese speaker) in English	Computer	Write often	Very active

Table 3

Overview of the Students' ESL Learning from the Teachers' Perspective

	Experience in teaching	Comments on Older Adult Students	Challenges for students	Students' preference in ESL learning	Students' Learning Strategies
Larry	No	Respectful	None	1. Worksheets 2. Ask Qs	Read the textbook over a lot
Jeff	Yes	Respectful Work hard	Memory loss for some	Interaction with the teacher	Varies/depends on students
Justin	No	Having opinions about how to run the class	Confidence issue in memory	List the activities of the day on the board	Repeat after the teacher
Mr. Wu	No	Older = harder and slower to learn	1. Memory 2. Pronunciation 3. Takes more time to learn 4. Lack of Foundation of English	N/A	Depend on students

Discussion and Analysis

Introduction

In this chapter, I will analyze the findings from the perspective of my research questions, which are:

1. What is the participants' investment in English?
 - a) What social challenges do the participants experience while learning English in the U.S.?
2. How do they prepare for the naturalization test in English?
 - a) What challenges related to their age do the participants experience while learning naturalization content in English?
 - b) What coping strategies do the participants adopt in the process?

I categorize this chapter into five sections including: naturalization, volunteer teachers, student participants, aging and ESL learning, and ESL learning after naturalization.

Naturalization

Why did the participants naturalize? Living in the U.S. for at least 5 years, some wished to feel a sense of belonging. However, even though they wanted to naturalize, they might not have been ready to assimilate to American culture. They were not exposed to the mainstream culture because of the language barrier, so they might have a hard time finding common ground with non-Chinese speakers. They might naturalize for many other reasons, including sponsoring their family members to come to the U.S. or receive federal public assistance. In Peirce's study (1995), immigrant women invest in English in order to seek better jobs or participate in the mainstream society. In McKay and Wong's study (1996), immigrant teenagers invest in English in order to leave ESL

programs and go into “usual” classes. According to Peirce (1995), the status of English learners is not equal to native English speakers, and learners have to invest in English in order to attain resources that they cannot attain otherwise, and in turn increase their social capital. In this study, the participants have to invest in English to pass the naturalization interview and become U.S. citizens.

According to Peirce (1995), learners’ purpose to invest in language usually relates to their identities. The reasons that the participants came to the U.S. were related to their identities. Some Taiwanese immigrants came to the U.S. for their children’s education. Based on my conversation with Mr. Kuo, it was common for Taiwanese wives and children to come to the U.S. while their husbands stayed in Taiwan to support their families. After the wives and children naturalized, the wives went back to Taiwan and the children stayed in the U.S. With Chinese immigrants, in contrast, it seemed that the common situation is that children sponsored the parents to come to the U.S. Chinese immigrants had to give up their identities as Chinese citizens after they naturalized. Therefore, Chinese immigrants would not naturalize if they thought they would return to China in the near future. For Chinese immigrants, taking the step towards naturalization test is a huge commitment regarding their identities, which also influences their ESL learning.

Volunteer Teachers

Why do ESL teachers want to volunteer at PCCC? Most non-Chinese volunteers at PCCC are interested in Chinese culture or language. They may want to teach in China or Taiwan in the future so they want to volunteer at PCCC first. Some of the teachers have learned Chinese before and want to expose Chinese speakers to keep learning the

language. Out of four teacher participants, two teachers mentioned that they want to do language exchange with the students at the center. Because the positions are all volunteer-held, the teachers did not get any compensation for teaching at PCCC. On the contrary, they have to pay for bus or parking fees to travel to the center. Therefore, volunteer teachers teach at PCCC because they are passionate about teaching and interested in learning languages. PCCC should develop ways to attract more volunteers. PCCC can connect with universities for interns or volunteers. It can notify students who are interested in service learning.

Student Participants

Among Chinese-speaking immigrants there are still complex identities within each individual and this research analyzes their usage of coping strategies to accommodate their identities. The student participants had very limited contacts with non-Chinese communities. Ms. Wong, Mr. Kuo and Mr. Lin did not reach out to other communities because they did not have the reasons to reach out. In previous research that was conducted with immigrants in K-12 or work settings, (Peirce, 1995; McKay & Wong, 1996) immigrants had to reach out to the mainstream community in order to survive. However, the participants in this study mainly lived in isolation from both settings. Their lives might be similar to their lives in China or Taiwan. The three participants learned English only in the classroom. Unlike the previous research where participants used English at work or in K-12 school settings, the participants did not use English outside of the ESL classroom. According to the investment model, language learning cannot be separated from its social context. The great distance between the participants and English speakers made it very hard for the participants to learn English.

On the other hand, Ms. Chen participated actively with the mainstream community. For example, she was the only participant who held a driver's license. She had very strong support from her American husband. Her husband encouraged her to learn English before they married. He paid for personal tutors to teach her English and driving. Her husband also invited friends or family members over so Ms. Chen could practice English. Even though Ms. Chen did not work or go to school, her home environment was a social setting with English speakers.

All four teacher participants expressed that students have certain classroom learning styles. They preferred lectures over group activities. For example, Mr. Wu's traditional teaching style, which focused on reading and writing examples from textbooks, was very popular among the students. On the contrary, the other three English speaking teachers who tried to work more on group activities were not as popular among students. Students often asked the teachers switch back to the lecture style. It was clear that students were not used to the group activities or did not think the activities were effective. It turned out that most students gave up communicating in English with each other and only chatted in Chinese during these activities. The teachers tried to include more group or pair activities but it was difficult for students to accept the group work. After a while, lectures were the main focus of the teaching at PCCC. Most teachers were passionate in teaching English, but many of them did not have much previous teaching experience. Therefore, it was common for teachers to change their teaching method based on student feedback. In addition, native English speaking teachers were usually younger than the students, and they often followed the students' advice. On the contrary, Mr. Wu clearly had more authority than other teachers because

he could communicate with students in Mandarin and was also closer in age to the students. Thus, he was more likely to insist on his own teaching methods.

Why did the participants choose to use matching Chinese words instead of learning the alphabet for English pronunciation? They had been isolated from mainstream community. Therefore, they had rarely communicated with English speakers. They were not aware of different pronunciation between English and Mandarin. In addition, they did not take English class before, so they did not know the English alphabet. They thought it was possible to learn English without the alphabet. Similar to McKay and Wong's (1996) finding, this study shows that participants can be highly selective in their English investment and what they focus on in order to achieve their purpose. The participants only intended to naturalize, so they did not think that learning the alphabet was necessary. However, as mentioned earlier, this could hinder the participants from learning the language or achieving their goal.

In McKay and Wong's study (1996), the learners use different coping strategies to resist or fit into the school system. Using the matching words in Chinese can be understood as the participants' coping strategy. In order to achieve their goal (pass the interview), they have to use the resource and they have to overcome the barrier (the pronunciation). Their Chinese background enables them to use Chinese characters to remind them of the English pronunciation. However, this strategy is mostly counter-productive because the pronunciation is simply too different for English speakers to comprehend. Memorization-only based strategy is also a common coping strategy for the participants in their ESL learning. In a way, these learners resist the common views

on learning structures (starting from alphabet) because their investment in English is only to pass the interview.

Teachers at PCCC can tell the students that they can actually learn the English alphabet. If students are aware that knowing the alphabet is more effective than using corresponding Chinese words, they can invest their time to learn the alphabet. Currently, many students do not want to invest time on the alphabet because they feel that learning the alphabet takes too long and besides it is not related to the naturalization test.

Teachers should inform students that the English alphabet is the key to any further English learning. In addition, PCCC does not currently have a complete curriculum or policy for beginning students. Students can choose to enroll in a citizenship class without any English foundation. Many students then do not do well in the following sessions because they can hardly pronounce the words. It could work if PCCC had a few students and the teachers could teach each student individually. However, the ESL program at PCCC has about 100 students, so PCCC requires a complete curriculum and policy regarding new student enrollment. Enrolling students are required to take a placement test that tests students' four language skills. Beginning students should have to take basic English pronunciation classes. At the same time, teachers should spend more time on the pronunciation of English alphabet due to decreasing hearing and processing speed. In summary, PCCC can retain curriculum and policies similar to community colleges where students are expected to take classes according to their levels.

In terms of student participants' responses toward English and Chinese speaking teachers, unlike the younger generation who often prefer taking the class from native

English speakers, this population seems to prefer Chinese-speaking teachers and Chinese lectures. It may relate to their preference of the translation method and their obsession for details. Older students at PCCC prefer to have every sentence translated to Chinese so they can completely understand what the sentence means. In addition, Chinese-speaking teachers can explain every small detail while English-speaking teachers focus on the meaning of the context. As a result, the students with the Chinese-speaking teachers feel they are learning English and understanding the ideas better.

However, students are often frustrated when they encounter English speakers outside of the classroom. They reported that they could not understand English speakers except the simple greetings. It results in powerlessness among the learners. They wonder why they can understand the teacher well in the classroom but not outside of the classroom. The Chinese translation lectures might be the issue. However, whenever there are only native English speaking teachers in the class, many students stop attending the class because the students cannot understand what the teacher said. Teachers at PCCC can let the students know the goal is not to understand 100% of what the teacher says, but to understand the main idea. Teachers can ask the students to find the main ideas several times during class and encourage students to ignore the tiny details.

Why do the three English speaking teachers feel there is no relation between ESL learning and students' older age? And, on the contrary, why does Mr. Wu think the age of the students make a negative impact on their ESL learning? One obvious difference is that Mr. Wu can communicate with students in Chinese while other teachers communicate with the students in English. Therefore, Mr. Wu probably

received more feedback from the students than other teachers. Meanwhile, English-speaking teachers might not be aware of the students' issues and cannot understand their feedback. Therefore, the three English speaking volunteer teachers may not know the challenges of the older adult students. However, Mr. Wu might have received many complaints from the older adult students about learning at an older age, including issues with memory loss or hearing impairment, so he is able to sense the older adult students' lack of confidence. On the other hand, English-speaking teachers may not be aware of the issues. They only evaluate students by their performance during the class. In the end, older adult students perform as well as their younger classmates because they are expected to do so. However, Mr. Wu might treat his older students differently, such as giving them easier tasks or speaking more slowly to them. Even though previous quantitative research shows that age of arrival and ESL comprehension can be highly related, this does not explain the reasons. Therefore, qualitative research is critical in order to explain the relation between aging and ESL learning.

Aging and ESL Learning

The current literature does not distinguish younger adult learners from older adult learners, but there are clearly two different populations. This research shows the unique perspective of older adult learners, including both cognitive and social challenges. However, this research also shows the strengths of older adults' ESL learning. This research study may inspire future research regarding older adult learners and SLA.

Cognitive development. Does ESL learning make an impact on older adults' health? Many older adult students at PCCC felt stressed about the naturalization test. One participant stated that the stress might cause serious health issues, like high blood

pressure or a stroke. Older adults might be more likely to have health concerns than younger adult learners. It correlated that they might be more likely to have health concerns when under stress from learning English

Ineffective learning strategies might also be the primary cause of their stress. Based on my observations, older adult students focus on memorization without English foundations. This learning strategy might cause extra frustration and stress because it is unlikely that learners will achieve expected desirable results through this method. On the other hand, older learners are often limited in their learning approaches if they are unfamiliar with computers, and older individuals often struggle with computer use. In addition, social isolation is also related to learners' learning strategies. Without being exposed to English speakers, learners will be forced to adopt certain learning strategies, like memorization of the textbooks or repetition from audiotapes.

As mentioned before, most quantitative research regarding aging and ESL learning only focuses on one or two variables, such as decreasing working memory, confidence, or environment issues. However, this research shows that aging is a complicated issue for learners, for it does not only deal with one issue, but a combination of issues, including both cognitive and social challenges. In the cognitive aspect, memory loss and decreasing processing speed are highly related. Both issues also relate to learners' hearing and pronunciation abilities. Learners who have memory loss or decreasing processing speed have a harder time with their hearing ability because they cannot keep up with the speed of the speaker.

PCCC has to accommodate both younger and older learners in the ESL classroom. Two populations have different learning paces and preferences. Younger

learners often prefer a faster pace in learning new knowledge and less review activities. In contrast, older learners prefer a slower-paced class and to have ample review sessions. Younger learners often work full time and take care of their children, so they can hardly dedicate to studying. On the other hand, older learners can focus exclusively on preparing for the test.

In addition, older adult students often develop a close relationship with the teachers. The population views teachers as friends or family members. On the contrary, younger learners usually do not develop any personal relationship with teachers. In summary, older adult students have extra free time in ESL learning. Teachers may have extra office or class hours for older adult students that focus on review activities. In addition, teachers can have additional social time with the older adult learners. Older adult students can utilize the extra time and still keep up with the younger classmates.

Social challenges. Isolation from the mainstream community can make the participants have a narrow perspective of Americans. Some participants still felt that they were not Americans, even though they have already naturalized. Ms. Chen told me “the second generation [of Chinese immigrants] is the worst. They were born here and think they are Americans. In fact, they are still not real Americans.” Ms. Chen defined Americans as white native English speakers. Because of her own definition of Americans, she felt she was not an American even after her naturalization. The participants felt rejected by American society, and harbor feelings which reinforced the idea that they were not Americans.

The participants felt they were not real Americans because as Mr. Lin stated: “even though you call yourself an American, others still don’t think you are a real

American.” They felt a lack of acceptance from the mainstream community. In my opinion, they were insecure about their own identities partly because they relocated to a different country at an older age. Older Chinese immigrants may not have access to linguistic resources because they feel they are not accepted by the mainstream community.

political identity. In contrast to the previous studies (Peirce, 1995; McKay & Wong, 1996), the participants of this study have been greatly influenced by their political identity. One reason might be that the participants of this study are much older than the participants of the previous studies. According to the investment model, the learners’ identities can be multiple and contradictory, and this often relates to their ESL learning. In many ways, their political identities can be very complex and contradictory. They might want to be distant from their Chinese identity but at the same time are insecure about their immigrant identity. Their political identities might lead them to the U.S., but at the same time hinder them from learning English. Some students might feel insecure about their political identities. After coming to the U.S., their political identity as a citizen of a communist country might hinder them from learning English and participating in the mainstream culture. For example, a student at the center did not want to naturalize because she was a member of the Communist Party. She was afraid that if the immigration officer found out about her identity, her son might not be able to naturalize.

Students at PCCC may rather separate themselves from non-Chinese communities because of their political identities. Even though it is important for this population to reach out to other ethnic groups, it is equally important for people in the

mainstream community to understand this population and their identities in return. The government might be able to make some changes to facilitate this process. For example, USCIS should explain clearly how a current or former member of a Communist Party can naturalize. The form currently only asks if the applicant is a member of Communist Party but does not offer any clarification on the consequence of the naturalization decision, especially in the case of China, where many have to join the party for certain occupations. Recognizing the insecurity issue is likely to be the first step for the participants to branch out.

The participants' insecurity about their political identities and trust issues might have an impact on this research and participating in political activities in the U.S. Chinese immigrants may be hesitant to answer questions regarding political issues. When Ms. Wong and Ms. Chen did not pass the interview, they asked me if I reported their learning situation and daily life activities to the immigration office. After I assured them that I did not say anything to the immigration office, they did not raise the issue again, but I felt they were not willing to share about their learning experience and opinions with me anymore. Based on the political and cultural factors they lived with in China, it was not hard to imagine why they worried about this issue. As a result, it might affect their social identities in the U.S. For example, they might not trust the government about their personal information. In addition, they might feel insecure with participating in any political activities in the U.S. Therefore, the multiple identities of Chinese immigrants can be contradictory. For example, they want to become U.S. citizens but at the same time they do not trust the U.S. government or feel accepted in U.S. society.

Both Taiwanese and Chinese immigrants share the same first language, but they are quite different in terms of political identities. For instance, Taiwanese political identity is more or less in line with the U.S. political identity in that both countries are traditionally anti-Communist. Therefore, even though there are language barrier issues, it is still quite comfortable for Taiwanese immigrants to adapt to the political situation here. In contrast, the Chinese political identity is at odds with the U.S. political identity in terms of the view toward the Communist Party. In addition to the language barrier, Chinese participants also have to cope with a significantly different political atmosphere in the U.S. During the interview, when I asked the four Chinese participants their political affiliations, they made it very clear that they had never joined the Communist Party. They also expressed the fear of being perceived as members of the Communist Party. One Chinese student at PCCC who had joined the party for occupational reasons asked me to keep the fact a secret from other students. It shows that even the most isolated Chinese immigrants can still sense the anti-Communist political atmosphere in the U.S., and the members of the Communist Party feel ashamed about their political identity in the U.S.

Even though being a member of the Communist Party is an honor in China, it can easily become a source of shame in the United States. According to Peirce (1995), the learners and their social network and power structure cannot be separated. This population, especially the former communist members, clearly experienced a social status downturn when they came to the U.S. Therefore, Chinese immigrants might experience great cultural and political shifts after moving to the U.S. On the other hand, many Chinese immigrants move to the U.S. and naturalize because they want to get

away from the Chinese political situation. The past political movements in China made them distance themselves from the Chinese government. They wanted to come to the U.S. to have a new political identity. In a way, they naturalize in order to gain a new political identity and to remove their previous political identity.

Different political policies also influence Chinese-speaking immigrants' national identities. Chinese immigrants are required to give up Chinese citizenship after they naturalize. On the contrary, Taiwanese immigrants are allowed to have dual citizenship. Therefore, students who have more incentive to keep their Chinese citizenship might have less incentive to naturalize. This includes people who receive pensions from the Chinese government or immigrants who had business in China. In addition, people who have family members in China might also not naturalize. However, if their family members want to move to the U.S., it is a strong incentive for immigrants to naturalize because of the Family Unification Act. In contrast, Taiwanese immigrants might intend to naturalize without these considerations because they do not have to worry about losing their identities as Taiwanese citizens or being denied entrance to Taiwan. Therefore, national identity is a factor regarding participants' investment in English or the decision to naturalize.

In addition, political identity and isolation are likely to be related. Chinese immigrants are required to give up their Chinese citizenship once they naturalize. Chinese learners may view both Chinese and American identities to be mutually exclusive. Chinese learners might be torn between the two countries. They might choose their Chinese identity and not acknowledge their American identity or try to integrate into the mainstream society.

Based on my observations, Chinese participants are careful and reserved about their opinions regarding the U.S. government. An issue of trust still exists. For many Chinese immigrants, the government is source of fear. For example, they are worried that saying the wrong thing might get them into trouble. Many Chinese immigrants are not interested in participating in politics in the U.S. They feel powerless and they cannot change their own situation by voting. Therefore, PCCC can promote civil rights during class. Citizenship class should not only be a test of English comprehension, but also a means to promote immigrants' political rights. The literature has seldom mentioned the participants' political identities in ESL learning, but this research shows that participants' political identity and their investment in English are often related.

first language identity. The teachers are also required to accommodate Mandarin and Cantonese speakers. In many situations, both populations study English in the same classroom. However, the teacher usually speaks Mandarin and English. Therefore, Cantonese speakers can progress more slowly than Mandarin speakers because they learn English through another second language (Mandarin). Some teachers might assume all students speak Mandarin. However, many Cantonese speakers can hold conversation-level Mandarin, but still have difficulty learning English through Mandarin.

Pre-existing education inequalities might be another issue. Most Mandarin immigrants come to the U.S. through occupational opportunities. Therefore, most older Mandarin adult speakers came to the U.S. because their children are working in the U.S. Older adult Mandarin speakers usually have high socioeconomic status and high academic achievement, which is how they could afford to send their children abroad. On

the other hand, Cantonese immigrants began immigrating to the U.S. in the mid-nineteenth century. Most Cantonese speakers came to the U.S. through their family members and they did not necessarily have high economic status or high academic achievement. Therefore, most Cantonese speakers are likely to have more learning obstacles than the Mandarin speakers.

In summary, among Chinese-speaking immigrants, a Mandarin speaker's identity can be very different from a Cantonese speaker's identity in ESL learning. The first step to improve the ESL teaching in the classroom is to recognize the different identity of each individual. Furthermore, curriculum design can be based on the different learning needs. For example, PCCC can offer a special beginning class to students who do not speak Mandarin and have not learned English before they came into the program.

gender and ESL learning. In contrast to McKay and Wong's (1996) study, which showed that female students have less pressure to succeed in school than male students, this study shows that female students are more willing to invest in English in order to naturalize. The male to female ratio was about one to two at PCCC. Many male students had to work during the class hours or they felt that they could not learn English in their older age. Therefore, even though they encouraged their wives to study for the naturalization test, they did not learn English themselves. In many cases, the wife became a U.S. citizen while the husband stayed as a Green Card holder for many years. PCCC can reach out to the older male students through their wives. PCCC can change the class schedule. Furthermore, teachers and administrators can convince the older adult male students that it is possible to learn English at an older age.

Many old male students may be too proud to make any mistakes in ESL learning. They might be afraid to make mistakes. This population might be especially vulnerable when studying with younger classmates because they do not progress as quickly as younger learners. Teachers can assure the students that everyone makes mistakes while learning a new language. PCCC can encourage this population to start learning English by showing this population the benefits of learning English, including more job opportunities and chances to meet more people.

previous ESL education. How does this population's previous English education make an impact on their ESL learning? Because most of the older adult Chinese immigrants have not had any English education, they must start from the beginning. On the contrary, most Taiwanese immigrants take ESL class during secondary school. One of the volunteer teachers, Mr. Wu, said he felt that the lack of previous education is the reason most of the older adults have difficulties learning English. Based on my observations and interviews, Taiwanese students seemed to have better reading and writing skills than Chinese immigrants. Mr. Kuo stated that his English teacher in secondary school focused on reading and writing. The common learning strategies in Taiwan were translation and memorization. There was not much practice for listening and speaking. Based on my observations, listening and speaking comprehension seem to be similar between Chinese and Taiwanese students. It shows that previous ESL education, even 30-40 years ago, may still make a difference in older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants' ESL learning.

family support. What is the relation between the family situations of older adult learners and their ESL learning? All four participants have strong family ties in the U.S.

Having strong family ties in the U.S. might be the main reason they intend to naturalize in the U.S. Their main focus in life is their family because they do not go to regular school or work. Therefore, they do not have many friends to communicate with. If their family members speak Mandarin, they usually have very limited opportunities to practice English. If their family members speak English, they usually have more opportunities to practice English. Therefore, support from family members is crucial to their success in ESL learning because family members are their main speaking partners.

What can the family members do to better assist this population? Family members are an important part of ESL learning for this population. Many students felt the lack of support from their family members. Their family members worried about older adult immigrants' health conditions and asked them to slow down their English learning. At the same time, they might not be able to spend much time teaching their parents or grandparents. Older adult Chinese immigrants usually have children who work and grandchildren who go to school. Both children and grandchildren seldom help older adults to learn English even though in most cases their children and grandchildren are fluent in English. Therefore, it is essential for their family members invest some time on this population, especially when learning basic English. Attaining a new language is usually the hardest at the beginning. Teachers and administrators can arrange meetings with students' family members and discuss how to best support this population with ESL learning. If family members and ESL teachers at PCCC work with students to review English lessons, this population will advance in ESL learning.

ESL Learning after Naturalization

Most students at PCCC invest in English in order to naturalize. After achieving their purpose, they may stop learning English. According to the investment model, language learning is also related to participants' social context and power structure. Therefore, if educators want to encourage students to keep learning English, it is critical to encourage the students to invest in English in order to become participants in the mainstream community. All four participants enjoyed living in the U.S. because of its environment and welfare system. Mr. Kuo told me: "In the U.S., air is better and houses are bigger; Taiwan is more polluted and crowded." He and his wife both studied at a community college. In their free time, he enjoyed taking long walks while his wife liked going to malls and parks. Ms. Wong wanted to stay in the U.S. after visiting China. When she was in China, the traffic was so bad that she was afraid of crossing the street. She also worried about the food safety. According to Ms. Wong, "I always choose what I like in supermarkets here, but I was worried choosing the food in supermarkets in China." Compared to the environment of China and Taiwan, the participants enjoyed living in the U.S. better.

Although my participants studied English to naturalize and improve their daily lives (being able to talk to building managers or read letters from the government), they also learned English for symbolic reasons. They felt they lived in America, so they were supposed to learn English. However, they might feel that they did not need to speak English because they did not go to school or work in the U.S. If students were convinced of the benefits of learning an L2 and recognized their unique status as standing between two worlds and two cultures, students might be more passionate in learning an L2 (Cook, 1999). Also, as Norton (1997) suggests, learners of English should be able to

claim the ownership of English and consider themselves legitimate speakers of English. As she describes, “English belongs to the people who speak it, whether native or nonnative, whether ESL or EFL, whether standard or nonstandard, then the expansion of English in this era of rapid globalization may possibly be for the better rather than for the worse.” It might be beneficial if Chinese-speaking immigrants could be aware that they are legitimate speakers of English and that English is a valuable communication tool.

Taking the exam made the participants serious about learning English. Passing the naturalization test served as a strong force for the participants to learn English. As the participants recalled, they did not spend enough time studying at community colleges. As a result, they tried much harder at PCCC because they had to pass the test. After naturalization, the participants understood that English was still important for them in daily lives. However, many of them stopped learning English because of other priorities in their lives. Some participants assumed their role as caregivers in the family. Some students found part time jobs. For example, after Ms. Chen naturalized, she had travel plans with her husband, so she could no longer attend ESL classes. Others might have felt little need to spend hours commuting to the center to learn English. They might not keep studying English after naturalization because they did not have to speak English on a daily basis. In contrast, some participants viewed naturalization class differently. Learning English became a hobby.

As Mr. Lin wrote in the local community paper: I used to think that I would not be capable to learn English because of old age and a bad memory. I was also worried that my health condition would not allow me to learn English. Now I

break through my burden. If I can ‘cook’ more English and spend a lot more time after class, I will be able to memorize the knowledge. Meanwhile, my brain becomes healthier due to the interests in learning and thinking.

Mr. Lin has a mindset that we want older adult students to have in learning English. The naturalization test brought many older adult immigrants to the naturalization program and motivated them to study English. Many older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants who lived in isolation for many years came to learn English because of the naturalization test alone. After naturalization, while some students were still interested in learning English, many might stop learning it because they did not feel it was necessary. Therefore, it was important to let the participants understand that there were other reasons to learn English even after the naturalization test. Learning English might make their lives more pleasant and convenient.

The journey of learning English is not over after the students’ naturalization. Administrators and instructors can pay attention to activities that help the population reach out to non-Chinese communities, such as arranging tours to local communities or hosting Thanksgiving or Christmas dinners. If instructors and administrators can help older Chinese-speaking immigrant students engage with English speakers, this population will be able to understand that English for them is more of a communication tool than just for a naturalization test. The older Chinese-speaking immigrants might change their English learning methods. Eventually, they might find out that the naturalization exam is a not only a path to U.S. citizenship but also a way out of isolation.

Summary

This research study enriches the current SLA literature by distinguishing older adult learners from younger adult learners. Secondly, this research focuses on a naturalization program, where most previous research focuses on ESL programs for job training or at K-12 settings. This qualitative research contributes to SLA literature from a holistic perspective of older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants' ESL learning.

Advantages and Limitations

There are certain advantages and limitations regarding this study because of its research design. Although most immigrants to the United States are documented immigrants, there is still about 10% of the total foreign-born population who are undocumented immigrants (Su'arez-Orozco & Su'arez-Orozco, 2001). However, all participants in the research are documented immigrants because undocumented immigrants are unlikely to take an ESL citizenship class. Undocumented immigrants need more attention because they might be more vulnerable and isolated than documented immigrants.

My position at PCCC and my identity as a Mandarin speaker has both advantages and limitations in my research, and one advantage on one side might be a limitation on the other. Lee (2009) argues that “The negotiation of being an insider and outsider can complicate the implementation and completion of a research study” (Lee, 2009). Being fluent in Mandarin and English enables me to conduct the research in both languages. Therefore, I conducted the interviews in English with English-speaking naturalization teachers and in Mandarin with the Chinese students and the Mandarin-speaking teacher. Because I do not speak Cantonese, I interviewed the sole Cantonese-speaking student participant in Mandarin. Based on my conversation with her, I felt that she was fluent in Mandarin; however, there might still have been a gap in our communication, because Mandarin is her second language.

My bicultural background would be important to understand culturally specific information and “capture subtleties in the focal students’ self-presentation and interactions” (McKay & Wong, 1996, p. 582). I was also an outsider because of the age

and culture gap. As a doctoral student in my early 30s (in contrast to my older adult participants), I might also be positioned as someone who was not familiar with their culture and values. Therefore, during the data-collection period, I clarified what the participants said and I did not interpret or make assumptions about their answers. From the participants' perspective, I worked as a naturalization test teacher and tutor in the same agency. Therefore, I was familiar with the requirements of the test. As an ESL student, I could sympathize with the students' studying experiences in the U.S. I worked as the ESL coordinator at PCCC. My job duties were mostly administrative work; it included recruiting and training volunteer teachers, helping students fill our naturalization application forms, and reporting student profiles to our funding agencies, including the city and state government. My status at PCCC might affect this study because of my relationship with students through work. However, as an ESL coordinator, I was seldom involved in teaching and tutoring activities. Therefore, I do not think my position would significantly influence the participants' opinions. Due to time constraints, this research was conducted on the students' learning experiences in a naturalization program, focusing on the identity issue and challenges in learning English. This is a case study of an ESL naturalization program mainly for older adult Chinese immigrants. Therefore, it is unlikely to generalize the findings to a wider population. However, the research enables us to gain a holistic view of older adult Chinese immigrants' experience in learning English naturalization content.

Merriam (2009) claimed "Internal validity deals with the question of how research findings match reality" (Merriam, 2009, p. 213). There are various interpretations of the same data. However, I used interviews, observations and document

analysis to triangulate the data. I also asked my participants to read my research findings to ensure my interpretations matched their experience.

Reliability in qualitative research refers to whether the findings are consistent with data collection (Merriam, 2009). To ensure my research findings are credible, I used methods such as triangulation and checking interpretations with the participants. I understand that a huge part of trustworthiness of this research depended on the researcher's credibility. I clearly stated my position as a researcher and any possible biases to ensure the reliability of my research.

Merriam (2009) claimed "External validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations" (Merriam, 2009, p. 223). I chose my participants based on the maximum variation method to enhance the external validity of my findings (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research focuses on the uniqueness of participants' experiences instead of generalizability. However, it is up to the readers and users to apply what they have learned in this study to their unique situations. Therefore, I used detailed, thick descriptions to enhance the transferability in order to help readers identify the relevance of the findings to their own situations.

Application and Conclusion

USCIS Policy

Naturalization test content influences immigrants' identities and ESL learning, especially for older adult Chinese immigrants, who have less incentive to learn English otherwise. By making the exam more practical with easier vocabulary, applicants might be encouraged to actually understand the words, instead of simply memorizing the difficult vocabulary, knowing they will not use these hard words in the future. In addition, the naturalization form currently asks if the applicant is a member of the Communist Party. Without the clarification, Chinese immigrants who are members of the Communist Party might hide their identities and distrust the U.S. government. The U.S. government should clarify that the Chinese immigrants who have joined the Chinese Communist Party without a choice can still naturalize. It might help this population gain a sense of acceptance from the mainstream communities.

Institution Policy and Practice

ESL curriculum. Students at PCCC actually have different learning purposes besides taking the naturalization tests. For example, students who are married to English speakers might focus on their listening and speaking comprehension. However, learners who seek job opportunities might like to focus more on reading and writing.

The naturalization test is a stepping-stone for many older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants, which inspires them to start learning English. In many cases, naturalization curriculum is the first step many older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants take in learning English. The curriculum in the naturalization test should be embedded with

stepping-stones to reach students' other goals. For example, students who wish to improve their listening skills can find more information on the textbooks or handouts.

Cooperation with other organizations. PCCC should build upon its long-term learning goal for its students. Currently, the practice in PCCC is that most of the students only focus on the naturalization test. After the test, they stop coming to the center. PCCC should apply for funding that can integrate naturalization programs into post naturalization ESL programs. Long-term learning will be made available if both goals can be met in the same organization. Otherwise, PCCC and other organizations should cooperate to accommodate students' learning needs. For example, after a student has passed the naturalization exam, the naturalization program can then send the student to another ESL program based on student needs, either related to work training or to learning everyday English skills.

Social Network for Students at PCCC

Limited social network is a main concern for students at PCCC because they do not have many networks outside of their family setting. Therefore, administrators can design activities to help them branch out into other settings. For one, networking with other students at PCCC might be helpful. Even though most students are Chinese-speaking, staff at PCCC can design some activities for the students to socialize with other students. In this way, students not only learn English at PCCC but can also share information and support each other in learning ESL. It is especially important for this population because many older adult students at PCCC need mental support from others because they do not have many friends in the U.S. PCCC can be a social setting where older adult learners meet others who are also interested in learning English. Besides

learning English, ESL class at PCCC can serve as a support group for Chinese-speaking immigrants to help each other overcome difficulties in a foreign country.

To solve the isolation issue I describe earlier, I recommend to increase communication among students. PCCC can have quarterly potlucks or other activities to engage all classmates. Students are encouraged to form study groups. Students are encouraged to share their successes and challenges with their classmates. In this way, these individuals do not only practice their English individually but also work together with other older students. They can witness the successes of their classmates and assure themselves that they can speak English fluently at an older age.

This population has been isolated from the mainstream community. One of the common issues this population encounters is that they do not have opportunities to use English (Wang, 1999). Therefore, creating opportunities for this population to engage with English speakers in an informal style, like a conversation group, might be one solution. Administrators and instructors can create opportunities to enable students to engage with English speakers, and older adult Chinese immigrants will be able to understand that English is for communication rather than view it as merely an academic subject. Furthermore, they might change their attitude and method of learning English. For instance, this population will focus more on understanding the big picture rather than specific vocabulary or flawless accent.

How can we better prepare the classroom as a social setting? Most students consider the classroom as their most important social setting. Many students like to share information and their experience in the U.S. with their classmates. At PCCC, they can relax and not feel like they are foreigners anymore. They can talk with other

Chinese-speaking older immigrants. They do not feel a gap in age, race, and culture with the people around them. Therefore, it is just as important for this population to have a social setting as it is for them to have a learning place. PCCC has many different departments. PCCC can combine social workers from different programs to make PCCC more accessible to older adults. The social workers can invite all their clients to have various social events. For example, PCCC can host various activities, such as outdoor activities or Karaoke, to bring older adult Chinese immigrants together. This population can meet people from various departments. In addition, PCCC can reach out to other Chinese immigrant organizations. PCCC can promote their services to older Chinese immigrants. Students can have a strong sense of belonging to the Chinese community, helping them feel that they are not alone.

Various social settings might have different values in terms of enhancing participants' ESL learning. Social settings, such as a school or a workplace, where members work closely together, are more likely to promote members to learn and use English on daily basis. Based on my observations, students at PCCC who worked part-time or full-time, or attended school regularly had better English comprehension than students who did not attend such social settings. Older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants might benefit from going back to school, work, or volunteer work settings. Educators can create opportunities for the older adults to use English in serious social settings with English speakers. For example, they can assign volunteer work to older Chinese immigrants. In other words, PCCC can create an atmosphere like traditional workplace or school settings after the students pass the naturalization interviews.

PCCC can encourage the students at the center to volunteer with other non-Chinese speakers in various settings, like libraries, churches, or temples. Furthermore, PCCC might be able to do job training for this population to work in various settings with English speakers. In summary, PCCC can do extra services to help this population besides offering ESL classes and other consultant services. Staff members might be able to think of extra services they can have to better serve this population.

PCCC can also serve the family members of the older adults because family members can become the support community for the older adults. For example, PCCC can host workshops on how to take care of elderly people or how the whole family can work together to help one another. PCCC can expand its services to the whole Chinese community, not only the older adult population.

Transportation can be an important factor in ESL learning for older adults. Many older adult ESL students at PCCC do not drive. They either live very close to the center, or they have to take the buses or ask their family to drive them to the center. The majority of students take the bus to the center to learn English. Many of them spend a couple of hours round-trip commuting to the center to learn English. In addition, some students might not be able to take buses because of their health conditions.

Administrators should apply for funding to acquire assistance for these individuals, such as shuttle buses that can take them to and from PCCC. In addition, providing bus tickets to students who cannot afford them could be another solution.

Currently, PCCC serves as a welfare system, but it can become a real community center for the older adult Chinese-speaking community. Community members can meet friends. In addition, PCCC can function as a place where this population can reach out to

English speakers. PCCC can contact non-Chinese speakers who are willing to reach out to this population, preferably older adult English speakers. Next, PCCC can arrange various activities for both populations to interact with one another, such as potlucks or hiking events. In this way, this population can reach out to English speakers and have more opportunities to speak English. PCCC can change from a consulting agency to a community organization.

Teacher Training

At PCCC, teachers frequently come and go, so the administrators need to recruit and train new volunteer teachers quite often and in a short amount of time. PCCC should develop ways to attract more volunteers. PCCC can connect with universities for interns or volunteers, and notify students who are interested in service learning. Most of the volunteer teachers might only stay for one and two quarters. Therefore, the training is quite important because most volunteers have had no teaching experience. In addition, there are unique factors about this student population. Volunteer teachers need to be aware of the cognitive and social challenges this population encounters in order to better teach this population.

The volunteer teachers should know that this population has very fixed learning strategies that focus on memorization. Based on that, teachers should be encouraged to develop lesson plans that include group activities. When students complain about these activities, teachers could explain to the students the advantages of group activities and learning by communication. Teachers can also tell students the disadvantages of focusing on lectures and the Chinese translation method. PCCC can invite former older

adult students to come back to the center and share their experiences in ESL learning with the current students.

Teachers should be aware of the students' ESL learning before designing their lesson plans. In addition, most students at PCCC rely on memorization strategies only and are not confident in achieving their learning goals. Even though students might ask the teachers to focus only on lectures, teachers can design activities that are communicative and cooperative, such as information-gap games. These games are designed to be played by pairs. All students have to participate in order to finish the game. Students need to work with others instead of studying individually.

Teachers can create opportunities for students from different cultures to participate in a mix of cooperative learning activities. For instance, the teacher needs to be aware that Mandarin might be the second language for half the students. Teachers can separate students into different learning groups based on their first languages, so students can only communicate in English, which is their common language within their learning group. For students at PCCC, teachers can pair Mandarin and Cantonese speakers for English conversation practice.

According to my observations, classrooms at PCCC can be noisy and undisciplined. Students tried to clarify questions with each other constantly because they were not clear on what the teacher said. Also, unlike traditional-aged students, the adult students at the center are much older than the teachers. Teachers might be reluctant to discipline their students. Teachers can ask students to follow rules, such as no cell phone use in the classroom. In addition, even though students should be allowed to clarify the questions with their classmates, they are encouraged to ask the teachers first.

Recognizing insecurity issues is the first step in reaching out to this population. Even though they do not interact with non-Chinese speakers, there are still be perceived threats from the mainstream community. The members of this population perceive they are different from the mainstream community. For many of them, they might have moved to the U.S. at an older age after they had already built an identity. Some older adult immigrants moved to this country voluntarily but some moved here only because they had to come here for their family. For the individuals who came here involuntarily, it might be even harder to adjust to their lives in a foreign country at an older age. PCCC can be a safe place where they can share their feelings.

Volunteer teachers should recognize that this population can be less confident and that it is important to boost their confidence. Many students at the center believe it is impossible for older adults to learn English. During the teacher training, administrators can assure volunteers that there is no evidence in literature that older adults cannot learn a new language. They could interview successful older adult learners at PCCC and share these stories of success with their students.

Teachers should also be aware the diverse identities among the students. In terms of language perspective, Cantonese and Mandarin speakers can share their experience in ESL learning. The Mandarin speakers might understand the extra educational obstacles Cantonese speakers face in ESL learning. Teachers should be aware that some students in the classroom do not speak much Mandarin. Therefore, Cantonese speakers may progress slower than Mandarin speakers. The diverse population can help students in terms of classroom group activities because the students can only communicate in English.

Encouraging students to share fear or trust issues concerning the government with teachers and classmates might be the first step towards reconciliation with their identities in the U.S. At the same time, teachers can design lesson plans to teach students the basic rights of U.S. residents and citizens. Students should not worry about getting into trouble for saying or writing the wrong things. Teachers can inform students that joining the Communist Party for job reasons should not be considered shameful.

Regarding issues surrounding nationality, it is important to reconcile both Chinese and Taiwanese identities for both students and teachers. Even though individuals from both identities might not fully agree with each other, they can still have a constructive discussion on the meaning of being Chinese or Taiwanese. Teachers might have a better grasp of students' background through these activities. Teachers should also be aware the potential conflicts because of the different social identities. For example, political identities can easily become controversial topics in the classroom. Teachers should not take sides on any political issues. However, teachers can invite students to share their different opinions.

Teachers should treat all students equally and ask students to respect each other regardless of their nationality, language or political identity. On the other hand, students can learn from one another. For instance, students can form study groups before taking the naturalization test. At the same time, students should have a chance to share their experiences with their classmates, so they can learn from each other. For example, a younger learner or teacher might not understand the issues older adult students encounter in ESL learning. Students at PCCC should have opportunities to share their learning experience with others.

Volunteer teachers also have to be aware of students' health concerns. Many students at PCCC have hearing issues. Some have more serious issues like high blood pressure. Teachers have to be aware of these issues when teaching the students. Furthermore, teachers should be aware that many students are stressed because of ESL learning and taking the naturalization test. Some students might have trouble sleeping due to stress, and this has a negative impact on their health. Teachers should be aware of the situation and be able to give students advice. For example, teachers can advise the students to be patient in ESL learning because students often complain that they hardly progress in ESL learning. In addition, teachers should know that some students have to take a break during class time because of their health conditions.

Teachers should be aware of the positive characteristics of this population. For example, students at PCCC are very active and eager to learn English. They also desire having close relationships with the teachers and want to give feedback to them. By understanding this population, the teachers can learn how to improve the ESL learning experience for this population.

Older Adult Participants

Administrators and teachers at PCCC can educate Chinese-speaking immigrants on the topic of diversity in the context of the classroom. For example, Mandarin speakers sometimes assume everyone speaks Mandarin or criticize Cantonese speakers for not being able to speak Mandarin. However, they do not try to learn Cantonese themselves even though Cantonese used to be a dominant language among Chinese Americans.

The other example is when they see “Americans” as white native English speakers and feel that people of color are not “real Americans.” It is crucial to expose this population to the racial and cultural diversity of this country. The participants view their naturalization interviewers with the same perspective. Immigration officers have a dominant power over the participants. When the participants passed the naturalization test, they often praised the officers for their kindness. However, when they failed, students complained that the test was not fair and the officers did not like them. In these occasions, I often heard students indicate that their interviewers were “not real Americans,” meaning the officers were not white or had a foreign accent.

Why does this population think of Americans as white and native-English speakers? This issue is crucial to this population because they exclude themselves as Americans even though they are naturalized. Furthermore, they might enhance the white superiority ideology. Some participants’ definition of “Americans” might be related to their cultural isolation from the mainstream community.

Therefore, PCCC can arrange workshops that discuss this particular issue. Before hosting these activities, it is necessary to inform students the importance of respect and of not being judgmental towards others. PCCC can invite Asian or African Americans to talk to this population about what race means to them and what it is like being a person of color in the United States. Students at PCCC from different political, language, or nationality identities could share their perspectives and how their identities shape their view of the U.S. and ESL learning. Through sharing, students can learn how to respect one another because they can understand how the others feel. Also, teachers can assure

the students that they are Americans once they naturalize. Assuring them of their American identity makes them feel they belong to this land.

After interviewing all four participants, I have noticed that all four participants had different reasons for naturalizing, and also have different concerns in ESL learning. What can PCCC do to improve their ESL learning?

Mr. Kuo is the only participant from Taiwan. He is reserved and humble. He does not talk much in the classroom. He is also very concerned about his memory loss. He lacks confidence in ESL learning. He has better reading and writing skills than listening and speaking. I also noticed that it takes him a long time to respond to the naturalization questions. In my opinion, he should take the learning pace slowly and have more repetition activities for ESL learning.

Mr. Lin was the oldest participant in this study. However, he was also the one who progressed the most during the research. He is probably one of the favorite students in the ESL program because he always helps teachers with various errands. He is the only participant in this research who does not intend to naturalize because he cannot keep his Chinese citizenship after naturalization. Learning English has become a hobby for him. On the other hand, he also has some negative comments about Cantonese speakers. He stated that Cantonese speakers are noisy during the class and did not work as hard. In my opinion, PCCC can offer him workshops about diversity. He will probably change his perspective once he becomes familiar with the challenges Cantonese speakers encounter.

Ms. Chen has had a tough past during the Chinese Cultural Revolution that makes her distance herself from politics. She was wondering if I leaked her information

to USCIS and that it caused her to fail the naturalization exam. She has trust issues with others and with the government because of her past experience during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Her political identity impacts her ESL learning because she is very reserved and careful when talking to both students and teachers. She is constantly worried others talk about her behind her back. The issue might hinder her from reaching out to other ethnic communities. She lacks trust in others and the government because of her past experience. In my opinion, hosting sessions in which students can share their past experiences and workshops related to civil rights and race are likely to be helpful for her.

Ms. Wong is the only Cantonese speaker in this study. She is friendly and humble in the classroom. She is sociable and talkative with other students both in Mandarin and Cantonese. However, she lacks confidence in ESL learning because she feels it is harder to learn English for a Cantonese speaker. In addition, she has not learned English before and thought it was too late to learn English at such an old age. She said that she is a housewife and has had very limited experience in second language learning. She missed classes constantly because she lived far away and had to take care of her daughter and granddaughter. Administrators and teachers can host more ESL classes that are bilingual in English and Cantonese. In addition, she can mix with Mandarin speakers during group activities in ESL learning. She might be able to come to the center more often if PCCC can apply more funding on transportation, such as providing commuter bus services or bus tickets.

Cook (1999) pointed out that L2 learners' goals should not be to become native speakers of English because English is not their first language. Cook (1999) states "If

students and teachers see L2 learning as a battle that they are fated never to win, little wonder they become dispirited and give up. L2 learners' battle to become native speakers is lost before it has begun" (Cook, 1999, p.204). Non-native English speakers are not failing to become native English speakers because they have advantages that monolingual speakers do not have like the ability to code switch between two languages. Therefore, in order to help older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants acquire English skills in an informal environment and become participants in the mainstream community, it is necessary that Chinese immigrants transform from English learners to multi-competent speakers.

With their learning challenges in mind, this study also acknowledges the participants' strengths in ESL learning. Their close relationships with teachers and classmates might enhance their ESL learning in the classroom. They gave feedback to the teachers, and they were not afraid of correcting teachers. Classmates helped each other with English and shared information about the naturalization test. Participants tried to clarify the naturalization content with each other, and the practice also made sure the beginning students had a chance to improve. Their relationships with teachers and other students in the classroom might help them reach out to Chinese or non-Chinese communities. As a result, based on their close relationships with the teachers, their success and engagement in the classroom showed a high possibility for social interaction in English if they felt comfortable with English speakers. They had a strong desire to reach out to other ethnic groups if they had enough language support. In addition, this population might have more free time than younger adults, as I observed that some older adult students stayed in the classroom long after class finished. Longer class sessions

with activities such as review practice and interaction among students could be designed to better accommodate these individuals.

This qualitative research can also help readers understand the phenomenon of ESL learning on naturalization content of this population through detailed description in various settings. ESL teachers and administrators may also gain a better understanding of older adult Chinese immigrants' learning characteristics and strategies. This qualitative study may contribute to SLA theories through the perspective of older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants, so this population might be better equipped to learn English and adapt to life in the U.S.

This study is significant because this population might be fundamentally different from current traditional-aged students. For instance, this population has gone through World War II, the Chinese Civil War, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and other terrible political movements. Indeed, I heard that the participants said that “We are the worst generation in Chinese history” during the interview, especially when we talked about Chinese immigrants' political identities. These historical events still affected their identities and ESL learning. This population requires more attention from researchers and may result in many possible future research topics.

Appendix A

Interview Protocol: Interview with older adult students (the following questions are translated into English, and the interview will be conducted in Mandarin).

Closed-Ended Questions Interview (Background Information)

1. Who lives with you?
2. Where do you live?
3. What is your country of origin?
4. What is your current occupation?
5. What is your religious affiliation?
6. What is your highest level of formal education?
7. Are you in the process of naturalization application?

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Why did you come to the U.S.?
2. When did you start studying English? Probe: classroom environment, positive or negative? Assignments? How did you feel about it?
3. Why do you want to take the naturalization exam? Probe: what does American citizenship mean to you?
4. How long have you been studying English in the U.S.? (Including the citizenship and ESL classes)
5. Do you speak English outside of the classroom? Probe: Where? What do you talk about? With whom? If not, why not?

6. How do you feel about your English comprehension after taking the ESL citizenship class? If your English improved, in which areas did it improve, and why?
7. Why do you want to study English except for getting U.S. citizenship?
8. What language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) are important to you?
9. In your experience, what content of English do you really need?
Have you experienced any changes in your life after taking the ESL citizenship class?
10. After immigrants naturalize, do you think they are Americans?
11. Do you feel that you are a member of the mainstream community?
12. Have you experienced any discrimination?
13. Tell me more about your working situation. What is your typical day like? Probe:
If you are retired, what is your typical day like?
14. What does the ESL program at Pacific Chinese Culture Center mean to you?
15. What is the main limitation that hinders you from studying English?
16. How do you feel about studying for the ESL citizenship program at your age? Do you think your age provides you with any benefits or limitations in studying for it?
17. How would you rate your memory?
18. How long do you think it will take for you to speak English fairly fluently?
19. Are you confident in learning English? Why?
20. Any health concerns that affect your English learning?

21. Do you want to know what happened in the U.S. today? Are you aware of the current gun control debate?
22. How often do you interact with your family members? Do you use English or Mandarin?
23. How do you feel about the Chinese government or the Chinese Communist Party?
24. How does Chinese identity affect your life in the U.S.?

Interview Protocol: Interview with ESL Teachers

1. Which type of teaching content do you focus on? Written or spoken English? Why?
2. In your teaching material for naturalization test, is there anything related to Chinese people or Chinese Americans?
3. What have students reported about their social life changes as a result of studying at the ESL naturalization program?
4. What kind of teaching material do the students like or dislike the most?
5. What kinds of assignments do you give to your students? Probe: any assignments related to interacting with other English speakers?
6. What relationship do you have with your students? (Like friends? Like family members?)
7. Describe students' learning strategies or characteristics. Prompt: rote or applied? What do the students report about their learning environment?
8. How do you feel teaching ESL (focusing on naturalization exam) to older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants? Probe, does students' age pose any benefits or

limitations? Do you make any accommodation for your students because of their age?

9. What are the main barriers that hinder older adult Chinese immigrants from learning ESL? Prompt: memory, hearing, pronunciation?
10. What do you notice about the classroom interaction among the students and the classroom interaction with you as a teacher? Prompt: do they ask questions about American holidays?

Appendix B

Observation Guide

Field notes will be recorded during the classroom observation, with a focus on the following information

Classroom Environment

- Table arrangement
- Seating arrangement

Teacher

- Prompts given to students
 - Teacher-initiated conversation with students
 - Instructions: Register of the language
- Teaching style (are the teachers friendly or stern?)

Older Adult Students

- Material used
- Conversation and interactions with peers (in English or Chinese?)
 - Student-initiated conversation with the teacher and each other
- Options of the language usage (Chinese or English) in the classroom

Attitudes toward the Teacher

Reactions to the Content/Questions of Naturalization Test

Instructional Activity

- Assessment (Challenges? In which selective languages?)
- Additional materials
- Verbal instructions

- written instructions (common errors?)
- Handouts

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