

Learner Perceptions of Language Choice in English as an Additional Language Classrooms

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Abstract

To better understand how and why students make choices about using first language or English within an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) context, a phenomenological approach was used in the present study to explore participants' understandings of classroom language choice in an international student bridging program at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, Canada. This exploratory study found that participants' beliefs surrounding language choice were related to their understandings of the purposes and best methods of learning English. Linguistic composition of the class, teacher behaviour and school/classroom policies were also important to the participants' determination of how much and when to use English. In addition, themes of social, cultural and linguistic affiliation were explored in relation to language choice, identity and language ideology.

Keywords: ESL/EAL; EAP; classroom management; English only, phenomenology; language choice; international students; language policy

Dedication

To all the courageous students who make my work so challenging, interesting and fulfilling.

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Contents

Approval	ii
Abstract	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature	6
The Good Old Days/The Bad Old Days – Traditions of Additional Language Instruction.....	7
New Beginnings for Teachers.....	9
Applied linguistics research.....	10
English power.....	11
Teacher power.....	13
New Beginnings for Students.....	14
Applied linguistics research.....	14
Affect’s effect.....	17
Classroom Difficulties and Questions.....	19
Chapter 3: Research Methodology	21
Research Purpose.....	21
Research Questions.....	21
Qualitative Research Methods.....	22
Why Phenomenological Research?.....	23
Phenomenological Research Design Overview.....	27
Procedures.....	28
Ethical considerations.....	28
The Setting: The English Bridge Program.....	29
Participants.....	29
Recruitment and selection of participants.....	29
Preparation for data collection.....	31
Participant profiles.....	31
Focus groups.....	33
One-on-one in-depth interviews.....	35
Transcription.....	37
Data analysis.....	39
Interpretation.....	41
Limitations.....	41

Chapter 4: Data Analysis	45
Data Analysis Introduction.....	45
Mismatching Ideas/Understandings about Language: Purposes, Learning and Use	46
Language group dictates language use: I Can't Speak English with a Chinese person!.....	48
Why do we learn English?.....	62
How do we learn English?.....	67
My English isn't good enough.....	69
Classroom Policy, Discipline, Teacher Time, Attention and Reaction.....	73
Creating and Maintaining Social Relationships.....	76
Chapter 5: Discussion & Conclusions	80
Differing Understandings: Blind Tug of War.....	80
What is English?: Who, Where and Why?.....	81
Fearing & Loathing English.....	83
Identity and How it Changes Language Use.....	87
The Rules: Teacher's Role in Maintaining the Language of the Classroom.....	89
Chapter 6: Implications & Concluding Remarks	92
Understanding Our Students: Communication.....	92
Consulting the students: Why?.....	92
Consulting the students: How?.....	93
Teacher Education.....	94
Limitations of the Study.....	95
References	99
Appendices	105
Appendix A: Focus Group Notes.....	105
Appendix B: Interview Debrief.....	108
Appendix C: Coded Interview Data Sample.....	112
Appendix D: Coded Themes.....	113
Appendix E: Graphic Organizer.....	114

Chapter 1 - Introduction

In my current teaching context – academic preparation English courses (in which the students are approximately 90% Chinese) at a mid-size Canadian university – it is very common to walk into the classroom to begin teaching and hear Chinese all around me. After I settle the class down and get started on the lesson, the students will speak English when prompted and reminded, but it is frequent that they speak their first language openly or with a degree of secrecy while participating in activities which are to varying degrees related to the tasks of the classroom. At the end of class, the students are dismissed and often begin social conversations in Chinese again. The silence of a classroom monitored for language use is striking to me in comparison to the social and boisterous communication of the first language open atmosphere. For many EAL (English as an Additional Language) teachers, a large part of the work (due to school policy or perception of their own role) is to keep that first language “chatter” at bay. This can be seen in practice in that there are often English-only policies in our EAL classrooms, ostensibly for the good of the students’ language learning, for their cultural adjustment, and so that we teachers can maintain leadership and understand what is going on in the room. Instructors and administrators try a variety of strategies, semester after semester, to stem the tide of first language and promote English communication in class and out. However, when I have spoken of this with laypeople (family, friends, graduate students in Education) outside the field of Teaching English as an Additional Language (TEAL), they have seemed shocked that teachers would prevent students from using their own language as a coping mechanism – linguistic or social. My own

suspicions that there are unexplored issues related to student language use and English only policy in my teaching context have led me to this project.

The language that should be spoken by students when engaged in learning / teaching English often seems to be an obvious choice to those embedded in the EAL community in an English-dominant context. When learning an additional language in a classroom setting, it could be considered common sense to say that the more practice and exposure learners get to that additional language, the more effective their classroom time and experiences will be. This common sense assumption is one that has dominated the field of language education for decades (Auerbach, 1993). However, upon closer analysis, it can be seen that the choice of an English-only classroom may not always be the obvious best choice that it seems to be. Exploration and discussion of the historical treatment of classroom language choice in language teaching methods and an analysis and discussion of the motivations and issues involved in which language is usually used in the classroom, derived from the literature in the field, will reveal that many of these language choices may be historically, politically, and personally motivated on the parts of teachers, school administrators and policy makers rather than always being pedagogically motivated and learner-focused.

In my experience and with evidence from Chau (2007), Ellis (2007), Storch & Wigglesworth (2003), it is clear that many classroom teachers and scholars in Education and Applied Linguistics still ask themselves which is the better medium of participation in the additional language (AL) classroom – the AL or the first

language? Some instructors continue to insist on an AL-only environment in their classrooms, while others (some subversively) encourage first language use. All classroom utterances are at issue: teacher talk, individual instructions, student pair and group work, and student off-task conversations.

The question of which language should be used or allowed to be used by students in an EAL classroom is a very important one because it greatly affects students, classrooms, and teachers both politically and pedagogically. In discussions of the learners' language use, this issue affects the types/complexity of activities and content that teachers will choose and the whole dynamic of the classroom. For instance, if students are able to use first language to explain the rules of a game or the rationale behind an activity to classmates who are confused, more complex and interesting tasks can easily be used in the classroom. Affective consequences from student anxiety and or motivation may cause hesitant participation in lessons or a lack of engagement from students who are fearful in the classes if first language is restricted (MacIntyre, 1995, 2007). There is also evidence that learning an additional language requires or is aided by use of the first language in many contexts (Chau, 2007; Corcoran, 2008; Cummins, 2007; Leibscher & Daily-O'Cain, 2003; Liang & Mohan, 2003; Swain & Lapkin, 2005; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003). Ironically, in restricting first language use, teachers may actually be stifling language learning. Students may also perceive an English only policy as oppressive, condescending or discriminatory, especially if socio-political factors create a power differential. For instance, these language policies might manifest as punishments, therefore creating an increased power differential between teacher and student.

In attempting to better understand the forces, opinions, research and positions which make up this fascinating debate, it is helpful to set the stage in a broad historical overview of the literature of additional language teaching traditions in order to understand how things came to be as they are today in EAL classrooms. The literature review will then move on to explore the teacher-centered and learner-centered reasons why it is important to understand this history more clearly. This exploration will endeavour to show that classroom language choice is not a simple, common sense choice and that political, linguistic and pedagogical factors may affect how students, teachers and administrators handle this complex issue. Following this review of the literature pertinent to the history of student language choice in EAL classrooms, this study will use a phenomenology-based research approach to attempt to gain an understanding of how students in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program understand this issue in their own situations. Through focus groups, in-depth interviews and data analysis of these events, I will discuss how students perceive the choice between English and first language. By attempting to understand the processes and factors involved in student language choice in the EAL classroom from a student perspective, teachers and learners may be able to learn more about how to handle this complex issue in a way that best facilitates language learning and classroom management for the benefit of all involved.

A broad review of the literature related to this topic will now be provided prior to explanation of the research purposes and questions. Following this, the

research approach and procedures will be detailed. Data analysis and discussion will be followed by implications and conclusions.

Chapter 2 - Review of the Literature

This review will use a variety of perspectives and areas of past research to illustrate the linguistic, critical and motivational factors involved in classroom language choice for EAL learners and factors motivating classroom policy for teachers of EAL. Research from immersion, foreign language instruction, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English as a Second Language (ESL) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classrooms will be used because research from across these contexts is largely transferable from a language acquisition perspective. However, this comes with two important caveats. One must account for the exceptions to this general treatment of language learning contexts created by linguistic homogeneity/heterogeneity in the classroom and the language practice opportunities that may or may not be present outside the classroom depending on the linguistic composition of the larger community and how the students interact with that community. In addition, in discussions of political issues and practical uses for additional language learning or first language, examples and research will be focused on EAL / EAP contexts, rather than the more general ones because EAL has important socio-political complications which make this debate separate and different from other language classrooms. For example, EAL classes by definition take place in an English-dominant society. They can often be multicultural and are commonly taught by Anglophone (often unilingual) instructors¹. As English is the

¹ It is difficult to find data on instructors' language background and ethnicity. TESL Canada does not keep such records (Aliya Jiwa, Personal communication, February 1, 2011). It is also of note that (in my experience) employment postings for EAL instructors often refer to English competence, but generally refer to competence in another language less often.

dominant language in these situations, a power dynamic amongst language groups is created. In addition, these types of classes have as their goal to give students access to a community (English, Academic, etc.) in which they are already living. This differs from a foreign language classroom, where students might be there to gain advantage linguistically for some future endeavour or for social status.

The Good Old Days/ The Bad Old Days – Traditions of Additional Language Instruction

For the purposes of discussing first language use in the classroom, additional language teaching research and practice can be divided into three main eras. The first two will be covered in this section. As Brown (1994) explains, in the first era, commonly called Grammar Translation, instruction was done almost entirely in the first language. The focus of this was memorization of grammatical and lexical items through translation into the first language. This overwhelming focus on first language in additional language interaction may be one of the reasons why many teachers and learners believe that additional language-only input is so essential today. Because this method was probably not very effective in helping learners to communicate authentically, the next trend in AL teaching may have stemmed from the use of this method.

The second era started in the late 1880s and progressed to use almost entirely additional language input and output in the classroom. This direction lasted most of the 20th century, during which language teachers and psychology and applied linguistics scholars were largely convinced that the most important element

of language acquisition was input and sometimes output in the additional language at an appropriate level (Brown, 1994). This belief led to the nearly all-encompassing takeover of EAL/EFL teaching by native speakers of English in EAL classes. Because first language seemed to have little to no purpose in the classroom, the native speaker of English became the automatic expert. Theorists such as Krashen (1985) believed that input at the appropriate level (termed $i+1$ or comprehensible input) would allow the learner to notice the features of the new language that were different from the first language's features, add them to knowledge of that new language, and use them in future utterances. This theory strongly supported the belief that all a learner needed was to hear enough "correct" English, and he or she would be successful. Other examples of this all-encompassing disregard for first language can be found in a number of communicative language teaching documents such as Brown (1994), Krashen (1983) and Nunan (1989). The reasons for this trend are nicely summarized by Cook (2001) in the explanation that most of those in favour of English-only classrooms use arguments that are based on either a model similar to first language acquisition (monolingual input and the need for communication driving acquisition) or an argument for first language and the new language using separate and non-interacting cognitive systems. Of course, probably the ultimate example of target language-exclusive classrooms comes from immersion models. This practice, with influence from the input hypothesis and the Natural Approach (Krashen, 1984 from Roy, 2008) maintains that the additional language can be learned with adequate access to natural linguistic input in the target language. It is notable that this practice is a very popular one in Canada,

which is likely part of additional language learning for many Canadian EAL instructors, including me.

As most EAL teachers working today were trained using documents written and research done in the 20th century, teachers' knowledge and practice in the field reflects this background. Many teachers, when asked, state a commitment to communicative language teaching, even if they use methods from a variety of eras. As a result of this communicative focus and the monolingual language backgrounds of many of today's EAL and EFL teachers, it became common practice to ban or discourage use of the first language in the EAL classroom.

New Beginnings for Teachers

Next, the third era of understandings about language use in the EAL classroom emerges. Subsequent to the communicative language teaching revolution of the mid-to-late 20th century, cracks have started to show in the logic that all language teachers should be speaking only and allowing only the target language in their classrooms. The following section will explain how some of the reasoning behind the questioning of this practice has included concerns about teacher and cultural power, racism and discrimination in recruitment of teachers, and empirical research related to the language learning pros and cons of a monolingual classroom.

In the 1990s, some changes started to happen. Auerbach (1993) called on scholars and teachers to admit that English-only classroom policies are not beneficial to students or to schools because they are oppressive. Some scholars

(Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Tollefson, 2000) believe that the oppressive power of English in today's world requires that allowances be made to ensure socio-political equity in the classroom. On the other hand, applied linguists are often looking for the most efficient theory and practice to allow learners to be successful in their language learning endeavours. English-only may not be the panacea that it was thought to be. To complicate matters, the classroom reality remains that teachers need to manage classrooms effectively and provide lessons and activities that will foster learning of the target language with attention to multiple factors including linguistic, teacher affect and the rights of students. Based on the literature in this area, it seems that students' opinions have not been sought on this issue. It is therefore difficult to speculate how student opinion figures into teacher decisions and policies.

Applied linguistics research.

It is easiest to study use of the first language in teacher classroom language use because it is much easier to monitor teacher speech than student speech and teachers are also better able to explain the reasoning for using a given language at a given time in a given context. Corcoran (2008) studied EFL teachers in Brazil and their use of Portuguese in the classroom. He found that among the benefits of teachers' use of the first language in a homogenous EFL context are speed, relationships with students and accuracy of translation of terms. Corcoran comments that although Brazilian teachers find the first language useful in the classroom, they are often required to use it secretly because of English-only policies

in the schools. Other research of teacher language in the AL classroom (Turnbull & Arnett, 2002) has shown that language teachers use first language in a great variety of contexts for myriad reasons; for example, helping students with very low levels of language ability or communicating abstract concepts in content or grammar.

English power.

When the debate is focused specifically on English rather than any additional language, many scholars (Leung, Harris & Rampton, 1997, Skuttnab-Kanagas, 2000, Tollefson, 2000) have discussed the idea that native speakers of English are the preferred leaders in the classroom not because of their linguistic and teaching abilities, but because of less equitable features of the field. Skuttnab-Kangas maintains that most EAL teachers are qualified by race and nationality (UK/North American and White) rather than by knowledge or skill. If this is true, it could also be true that the language of the EAL classroom must be monolingually English because this is often the only language that the teacher is able to speak and understand. Tollefson's work makes it clear that it is the proliferation of English in educational, governmental and business contexts in addition to its powerful colonial past that makes it most attractive as a classroom lingua franca rather than any language learning benefits of a monolingual English classroom.

The editors of *The Sociopolitics of English Language Teaching* make the introductory comment that:

We [English teachers] are the frontline deliverers of a series of formal and informal, planned and unplanned language policies which, haphazard as they may be, seem to be heading in the same general direction – a direction involved in the implementation of a unique linguistic experiment on the entire population of the planet. (p 5.)

This statement makes it clear that as a large group, English teachers have a great amount of power, sometimes ill-considered. As Tollefson (2000) quotes Phillipson (1992), the adoption of English as an international lingua franca really benefits those in core English speaking countries the most. The adoption of English by many countries as an additional language of education, business, or government, causes people of high status in those countries to have access to some of the resources that English affords users in the core (privileged) English-speaking countries. If this idea is moved to the classroom context, we can see that the same could be true on a micro level. If the language of the classroom is monolingual English, it may benefit the monolingual (powerful, White, Western) teacher most, the non-native English speaking teacher less, and the confident high-ability student a little more than the low-level, anxious student who likely needs the most assistance and freedom in the classroom. In terms of equality, it makes sense that because English is often the only common language, it should be the language of the classroom. However, from an equity perspective, those with the least power and advantage should have the most support (Kumashiro, 2000). Using the claims of these scholars together, it becomes clear that the students, who have the least power and the highest need for flexibility and freedom in language choice, should have it.

Teacher power.

Teachers' opinions of students' first language also inform this discussion. Ellis (2007) gives examples of teachers' pejorative descriptions of students' first language usage. Terms such as "jabber" and "mutter away" are used by teachers to describe students' use of first language in the teacher's presence. This reaction to the first languages of the students is at best a criticism of their linguistic merit as a learning tool and at worst an example of intolerance and superiority on the part of the teachers. Ellis goes on to describe a second phenomenon that shows a condescending attitude on the part of the teachers. She tells the story in which although the students are adult EAL learners, many teachers use a "policing" orientation in maintaining English as the classroom language. She also explains that learners who use first language in class are characterized by teachers as lazy, rude, bad or tricky. These descriptions of teacher attitude show a clear frustration with trying to maintain English as the language of the classroom. They also show a clear power differential between teacher and student. It could also be argued that these policies are reminiscent of colonial attitudes toward cultural change and control that have been exerted in what has been claimed to be the interests of oppressed groups, such as when Aboriginal peoples were punished for speaking their first languages in residential schools in BC, Canada during the 20th century (Carlson, 2001).

New Beginnings for Students

There are also very significant reasons why students and student advocates have begun to question the monolingual use of English by students in the classroom. Empirical research shows that students will use their first language effectively in certain contexts in order to facilitate learning or manage tasks, as will be detailed in the following section. It seems that in many instances, the requirement to speak in only the additional language can actually hinder the students' language learning. In addition, there seem to be affective, motivational and practical reasons for encouraging students to use the first language.

Applied linguistics research.

In the 1990s, many researchers in a variety of language learning contexts started to do research about what happens when students are allowed to use their first language in the additional language classroom. While it is difficult to separate the variety of complex factors that can influence language learning (instruction, emotion, linguistic input, linguistic output, environment, aptitude) and the varied language skills and elements (reading, writing, speaking, listening, pronunciation, grammar, content in additional language), it is helpful to consider some of the second language acquisition research that focuses on first language in the additional language classroom.

Some studies have looked at how students naturally use first language in the classroom if allowed to and have found that its use is varied and supports AL learning, especially content learning. In a content-based high school EAL classroom,

Liang and Mohan (2003) found that first language was used mostly for reasoning, communicating abstract glosses, spelling and understanding difficult content. These functions are all very different from one another. Some of them could be used simply for speed, while others may be used because the student does not have the linguistic ability to perform this function in the AL. Leibscher and Daily-O’Cain (2003) found that foreign language students will code switch to cope with tasks that are too difficult, but they will also revert to first language in order to “contextualize the interactional meaning of their utterances” (p. 501). This means that language learners will also use the first language strategically to make their AL utterances more comprehensible to the listener. Further evidence from Chau (2007) shows that students in new immigrant EAL classes will use first language as a learning and communication strategy, and for meta-linguistic functions.

Cummins (2007) details a variety of contexts and ways in which first language has been found to be useful in multilingual or EAL classrooms. For instance, he explains that first language can be used for collaborative tasks and can aid learners in gaining access to a solitary writing task by conversing in the first language and that there is evidence that bilingual dictionary use and other applications of translation (such as contrastive meta-linguistic analysis and focusing on cognates) can be very useful to target language learning. In addition, the cognitive processes of building on and using prior knowledge (likely from the first language), particularly for the development of conceptual understanding and underlying systems such as literacy, may be accessed through both languages if both languages are used to develop them.

The idea that cognitively demanding content requires or at least encourages students to use first language in the classroom is echoed by several studies cited in Swain & Lapkin (2005). They maintain that when first language is used in collaborative work in the classroom, it serves socio-cultural scaffolding and mediating functions to aid comprehension and future use of those concepts in the additional language. Storch and Wigglesworth (2003) also put it very clearly, "Only when learners gain a shared understanding of what they need to do can they proceed with the task." (p. 767). Citing Lantolf (2006), they also go on to explain that in Vygotskian terms, by extending the zone of proximal development through scaffolding with the students' first language, students are able to reach a higher cognitive level in learning and communication.

And so it seems that there are a variety of uses for first language in the EAL classroom that are pedagogically sound and useful to encourage or permit and support students to employ meta-language, learn content, gloss difficult terms, explain and clarify difficult tasks. First language can be used to make classroom life easier and more useful for students at a variety of levels in some contexts. If it is true that first language can be used to mediate tasks and concepts that are currently beyond the linguistic reach of students in the target language, then first language might be an invaluable resource in the EAL classroom, and especially in the EAP classroom, where content can be highly conceptual and abstract.

Affect's effect.

Further evidence in support of first language's usefulness in the classroom comes from second language acquisition and psychology evidence that learner anxiety has a significant negative effect on language acquisition. MacIntyre (1995, 2007) has shown that trait, situation specific and state anxiety all contribute negatively to a learner's willingness to communicate and ability to participate in language learning activities and therefore learn and progress. If a student is anxious using the AL for reasons such as communication apprehension, fear of negative social consequences or anxiety about being evaluated by the teacher (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989 in Brown, 1994), having the first language as an "in case of emergency" option (to ask for a quick translation or explanation of a task) could help learners to cope with what could often be a debilitating emotional state in the classroom. In an applied example, Grant (1999) quotes students who stated in a questionnaire, "I feel so tense in class that I can't really pay attention. It's stressful to speak English when I'm not allowed to speak Japanese" and "I like to speak English, but if I get scolded or punished because I forget and speak a little Japanese, I don't want to speak English anymore" (p. 9).

For English for Academic Purposes (EAP) students in a Canadian context, the issue of choice in academic culture is especially significant. Many students come from educational systems in which student choice and autonomy are downplayed. In this new context, should these students be encouraged to follow the teacher-created rules and allow the classroom policy to dictate what they do, as they might have been in their origin countries? Or, should the students have the responsibility

to choose and maintain their own behaviours in the classroom? They are about to enter a world of much more unrestricted choice – a Canadian university setting. As they become increasingly independent away from influences of home and family, they will choose electives, social activities, how much time to spend on schoolwork, peer and linguistic groups, etc. Allowing these students to choose when to use English and when to use the first language inside the classroom might actually be a more realistic representation of what happens outside the classroom. In this case, it might be important to treat adults as adults and allow them to make choices in their learning, just as they will need to in the academic culture that awaits them. Taking this view, an EAP instructor trying (often in vain) to enforce a strict classroom first language prohibition seems to run counter to this notion of building familiarity with that culture and allowing students the freedom to develop it.

Grant (1999) also discusses the idea that teachers often seem irritable when trying to enforce English only policy. This might lead to further problems with student affect. Teachers who show anger, frustration or exhaustion or are inconsistent with English-only policy might be likely to alienate students and cause more anxiety in the classroom. In addition, further reasoning for avoiding the banning of first language in the EAL classroom can be found in the difficulty in enforcing such policies. Teachers who show negative emotions when enforcing policies might be seen in a negative light, criticizing the students who are having the most difficulty in the class. This might also have an impact on classroom atmosphere, students' willingness to learn, attend classes, and form positive relationships with instructors.

Classroom Difficulties and Questions

Should first language be allowed and supported for language acquisition, cognitive, affective, power, and motivational reasons in the EAL classroom? Is it the ethical and pedagogically useful choice? Is it really a waste of teacher time and patience to spend so much effort policing language use in the classroom? Analyses of the linguistic, pedagogical, and socio-political ideology and evidence were presented above. In reply to these ideas, Scott & De La Fuente (2008) ask, “what is the problem” with allowing first language in the EAL classroom? In response, classroom teachers might say that allowing first language in the classroom is a practical nightmare and a slippery slope into classroom chaos.

One difficulty lies in how and when students should and can use first language. Asking students to decide when to use first language and when not could be very challenging for them. While it may be natural to use first language as a path of least resistance, thresholds for resistance may become so low that they negotiate most tasks in first language. In addition, it is to be expected that not all students will agree on which times are appropriate for first language use. Some students might believe that it is never appropriate, while others will use first language at every opportunity.

In an EAL context, it is likely that multiple language groups will be present in each classroom. Is it possible for a teacher to encourage some use of first language and still allow for fairness and inclusion of all learners in the classroom? There is a danger of excluding some groups of students. A multicultural context and a

monolingual teacher further complicate the practical matters of running a classroom. How can a teacher know if students are on task with multiple languages being used in the classroom if he or she does not share those languages with the students? Therefore, it is clear that the issue of allowing or disallowing first language in the EAL classroom is problematic for teachers and, by extension, for students. This also calls into question what students might actually think about being allowed or disallowed to use their first language in class and how they might do so.

It stands to reason that students may feel a lot of pressure to speak English in EAL classes based on the rules and expectations of the teacher and the institution. But how much is really known about how the students feel and how they make their linguistic choices in class? Liang and Mohan (2003) report that students said in interviews that they want to use more English due to pressure from parents and teachers. However, they are not able to stop themselves from using the first language during collaborative activity in a high-school classroom. If students want to use more English, is it really beneficial to encourage first language? Unfortunately, much less is known about student experiences and understandings of language choice in the EAL classroom. In the past, most studies have focused on teacher language or observational methodologies which do not uncover experiences of students or answer the “why?” questions of this controversial topic. In order to answer some of these questions, a phenomenological approach will be used in the following study.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Research Purpose

The purpose of the research is to explore and understand more about the motivational, investment, teacher-driven, cultural, linguistic, and context-specific factors that guide student language choice in the EAL/EAP classroom. Ideally, this exploration will lead to a clearer understanding of how teachers and students can work together to create classroom policies, dynamics and habits that support language learning through a more balanced, equitable and useful employment of English and first languages in the EAL/EAP classroom.

Research Questions

Primary Research Question: How is language choice in EAL classrooms shaped by past student language learning experience and experiences with classroom language policy?

Additional Questions:

1. How do students perceive the effects of classroom language policies on classroom language choice?
2. How do student experiences of classroom conditions (teacher behaviors/reactions, language groups present) complicate these experiences?

Qualitative Research Methods

According to Silverman, “the choice between different research methods should depend upon what you are trying to find out” (1997, p. 1). When reviewing past research in this area, it is easy to see that in both applied linguistics and education, it is common to study issues of language choice and language use in the classroom by counting utterances and analysing how, when and how much each language is used by students and teachers in the classroom. Observation is a commonly used methodology in this area because many researchers believe that it is important to know how, when and for what purpose students use first language in the EAL classroom. As an observer, I could watch what the students do and try to guess what is happening in their minds and I could ask them what they think and feel about this question. The former would follow a more objectivist world view in which I could observe events as they “really” happen and derive some sort of objective truth about student behaviour, classrooms and language learning from them. However, I am interested in how the students *experience* the choosing of one language over the other. This is because I believe that in the EAL classroom, students make decisions about which language to use based on some internal understandings and experiences of which they may or may not be explicitly aware. To understand more about why students make the language choices that they make, it is necessary to speak with the students about their impressions, experiences and understandings of language choice. I believe that the students’ perceptions of the classroom, relationships, rules, events, etc. are inseparable from possible answers to this question. These understandings are of value because it is the student who

makes the decision to speak in English or in his or her first language. Any worthwhile understanding of how that decision is made or why it is made in certain ways must include the students' perceptions of classroom events and perceptions of self and relationships in that context. While talking to students about their perceptions and experiences in the classroom may not give a complete answer to how the issue of English-only policy should be handled in the classroom, it will surely give a valuable perspective on the issue. This is the perspective that comes closest to representing the students and their voices.

Why Phenomenological Research?

Because I believe that observation of students and their behaviours is not sufficient to understand their actions related to language choice, it was clear that I needed to speak directly with students about how they experience, understand and negotiate this situation. Simply observing and evaluating from my own perspective would not suffice. In order to do so, a research methodology which involved in-depth interviewing was needed. To focus on student voices and perceptions, I chose an approach that would allow the students' voices to be accounted for in the data collection and analysis – a phenomenological approach. This philosophy and methodology is very open and interpretive, and can be difficult to define.

Philosophically, the focus of phenomenology is experience and meaning of a phenomenon as experienced by individuals (Creswell, 2006). As it was clear to me that I wanted to focus on the experiences and understandings of the participants in relation to the issues of classroom language choice, phenomenology was an

excellent fit because it steered the research in the direction of the students and their experiences of this phenomenon. It was very appropriate because it suits my question both philosophically and methodologically.

The question of how EAL students experience the choice between speaking in English and speaking in their first language is not a question of causes, effects, or results. It is a question related to understandings, experiences and meanings. “Meaning questions can be better or more deeply understood (but not done away with), so that, on the basis of this understanding I may be able to act more thoughtfully and more tactfully in certain situations” (van Manen, 1990). It is for this purpose that I undertake this research. Despite many conversations (debates) with colleagues, much reading and many hours of contemplation on this topic, I still seek to understand what happens beyond my own experience and that of my colleagues in an effort to react and plan better in my own classroom. So often, conversations relating to this issue are framed in terms of the teacher and what the teacher needs and wants. A phenomenological approach will help me to focus on the students and their experience, which I believe to be an under-represented focus in this conversation both inside and outside the research.

Phenomenology moves this research in a direction which is helpful to this question. Phenomenological inquiry takes as presuppositions that human experience cannot be wholly explained through testable “scientific” measures and that there is value in exploring the world in a philosophical way. In addition, phenomenologists hold that the “reality of an object is only perceived within the

meaning of the experience of the individual.” (Creswell, 2006, p. 59). This philosophical tenet falls in line with my beliefs about the world and about my own classroom. The lived experience of the individual is a rich and worthwhile place in which to find clues to the answers to the questions of what is happening in the classroom.

For those wishing for a more in-depth understanding of what it means to approach something phenomenologically, it is useful to understand some of the philosophical underpinnings of this approach. The term Phenomenology is derived from the phenomenological philosophers of the 20th century such as Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Ponty and Quine. In writings about the philosophy of phenomenology, these philosophers focus on the experience of phenomena in the world rather than the object itself (Cerbone, 2006). Cerbone provides a useful example of this in reading without one’s glasses. Instead of focusing on the reading itself (words, meaning, page size, etc.), it forces one to focus on the experience of attempting to read while unable to do so. This might be confusing, frustrating, blurry, slow, a struggle, etc. This example is useful in this study because it will focus on the *experience* of making language choices in a certain context, rather than what the problem might be the classroom when students don’t do what teachers want them to do. I will attempt to do so while focusing on participant experience of the choice rather than on causes or features of the choice itself.

Methodologically, Phenomenological research focuses on describing the essence of a concept or phenomenon by distilling the lived experience of several

individuals in their experience of that phenomenon. Phenomenology is philosophical rather than methodological in its basis, but the methodology of phenomenology does include such practices as bracketing out researcher presuppositions (also called *epoche*), interviewing a variety of participants who have experienced the phenomenon, and attempting to understand the experiences in terms of common themes (Creswell, 2006). I have chosen phenomenological inquiry for this project because both the philosophy and the methodology are appropriate for the question, the participants and the researcher.

More specifically, in terms of method, phenomenology in educational research employs techniques in gathering and analysing data which focus on the learner and the learner's experience, while still taking into account the perception and presuppositions of the researcher and the teacher. It seems an excellent fit to use an approach which focuses on student experience, understanding and perceptions in answer to these questions about student perceptions of language choice. It seems highly intuitive that language choice in EAL classrooms must be influenced by the emotional and experiential realities of the students, rather than by some more concrete factor which might be studied with a less learner-centred approach. In addition, it has been noted that the learner perspectives related to this issue have been less studied than teacher perspectives through report, disclosure or observation. "Little has been said about L2 students' perceptions of first language and L2 use in class and about dilemmas L2 students may experience with bilingual classroom discourse" (Liang, 2006, p. 144). This theme continues with the practice of *epoche*. Bracketing out the instructor's (my) assumptions to whatever extent

possible seems the right thing to do given that much of the discussion on this issue has been framed in terms of the teacher.

We might also ask how these experiences and understandings could inform classroom behaviour. For Willis, “perceiving precedes meaning or acting. We simply feel inwardly in certain ways about the external world we perceive before we can consider what our feelings mean or before we can consciously attempt to change anything.” (1991, p. 174). Here we can see the relationship between experience, perception and action. Although this study will attempt to focus solely on the experience and the perception of that experience, it is both useful and inevitable to remember this link to (re)action.

In short, this inquiry serves not to uncover some (questionable) objective truth about how language is best learned or how to best handle classroom policies of second language learning. Rather, the purpose of this study is to inquire into the lived participant experiences that could guide student behaviour. This will be undertaken in an aim to inform me and perhaps colleagues and readers of these pages so that we might react to classroom situations in a more enlightened and perhaps student-centred way to the challenges presented by this topic.

Phenomenological Research Design Overview

As detailed in Creswell (2006) from Moustakas (1994), phenomenological procedures begin with a description of the phenomenon to be studied and disclosure and documentation of the researcher’s preconceptions of the phenomenon. The researcher then usually interviews participants and does a

transcription of the statements made by them. Data may also be collected in the form of written statements, emails, visual art, music, etc. Data are collected by beginning with two very broad questions: "What have you experienced in terms of this phenomenon?" And "What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?" (pg. 63) Once data have been transcribed, the researcher attempts to see themes emergent in the words of the participants and distills them into a description of the phenomenon from the perspectives and experiences of the participants.

Procedures

Ethical considerations.

Permission was granted by Simon Fraser University Department of Research Ethics on March 22, 2010 to conduct this study. The participants were given information in regular EBP classes during the second to last week of the semester. It was important to safeguard the confidentiality of the participants, so I was careful to maintain this throughout the study by asking the teacher to leave the room during presentation of the study and signing of informed consent, and by changing the names of participants to pseudonyms. Ethically, it was also important to separate participation in this study from the student evaluation in the course. This was done by waiting until course results were given to begin focus groups.

The setting: English Bridge Program.

The English Bridge Program is a 10-week academic skills and language program comprised of 3 courses (Academic Skills (reading), Academic Culture and Communication (speaking, listening and academic culture), and Academic Writing (critical thinking, citation, writing essays, grammar, IELTS practice)) and an IELTS examination score. The participants in this program are usually relatively recent arrivals in Canada who already have an IELTS score of at least 5.5. If successful in all aspects listed above, participants are then granted direct entry to first year university. Successful completion of EBP is evaluated on a pass/fail basis. Each student receives a pass/fail mark for each course and the IELTS score is considered. In order to complete successfully, students must receive a pass mark for each of the 3 courses in EBP and an IELTS score of at least 6.0. If a student does not pass or complete all of the EBP courses, he or she may still enter SFU undergraduate coursework with an IELTS score of 6.5 or higher, the usual score for entry to undergraduate coursework.

Recruitment and selection of participants.

On March 23, 2010, I began recruiting participants from EBP. The first step was to outline the study and facilitate informed consent of the participants. I then observed the classes for one hour each to observe student behaviours for selection purposes. I was mostly looking for classroom participation. Finally, I asked each teacher to provide a few recommendations out of all of the students in the class based on the criteria of personality, reliability and fluency. In both the observation

and the teacher recommendation, I was looking for participants who would likely be able to contribute a sufficient amount of data by being talkative, able to attend meetings, and able to speak English communicatively for interview purposes.

The presentation of the study went well, with one exception. Many, many students were planning to leave Canada during the semester break (when I wanted to start research) and were not available during the last weeks of April and the first week of May. As a result, I moved my second focus group 3 weeks later.

Some classes were more enthusiastic than others in participating. In some classes, students signed up even if they were not really available during my time window. I had a sum total signup of 31 participants consenting. From this list, I eliminated those that would be away through April/May (due to worries of attrition) and then cross-referenced my classroom observation notes with the teachers' recommendations. From that list, I identified 18 participants that I invited to participate in focus groups.

The original invitation was sent on April 12, 2010 by email. From this invitation, a few responses were enthusiastic and swift, but I needed to email others a few times. One unexpected problem was the mode of communication. It seems that EBP students do not check their emails regularly. I considered telephoning participants who were not responding, but I decided that it was more important not to pressure participants at this early stage. I really wanted to attract participants that had the time and inclination to participate, rather than those who might be able to say less or have less time or inclination to participate.

Preparation for data collection.

Prior to beginning data collection, I began a personal journal to acknowledge and distill my preconceptions about the phenomenon, as recommended in Creswell (2008). The purpose of this is to “attempt to set aside the researcher’s personal experiences.” I found this beneficial in that while I collected the data, I was really able to discern the participants’ voices from my own. In the discussion and conclusions section of this paper, I have utilised these assumptions in order to triangulate some of my findings using my own perspective. It is also interesting to note that the questions that were used in the focus groups came from these assumptions. As will soon be explained, my initial questions were not very useful.

Participant profiles.

The participants in this study were international students who had recently completed the English Bridge Program at SFU. They all happened to be from China (except one focus group member). In recruitment, this was not intentional, but the vast majority of participants in this program hail from this country, so it was likely that this would be the case. It is probable that this will influence the data and results of this study in that I will be speaking with a subset of participants from the English Bridge Program who have something in common. Similarities in their experiences may be a result of culturally specific experiences or linguistic features that are specific to this group.

The focus group participants were relatively newly-arrived international students who had been living in and studying in Canada for 4 months to 2 years, with the average being around one year. The interviewed participants were 4 females and 2 males, all of college age (within a 3 years of finishing high school). The following information includes pseudonyms used in the data analysis:

1. Mei had lived in Canada for 9 months. This was her second attempt at EBP. She stated that she suffers from homesickness and that her mother visits frequently from China.
2. Bobby had been in Canada for only the period of EBP, about 5 months after completing high school in China
3. Fiona had been in Canada for two semesters (about 9 months) and had completed lower level EAP program at SFU prior to taking EBP. She lived with her elementary school age brother and was responsible for his care, despite being only 19 years old. She is a permanent resident of Canada.
4. Anne had been in Canada almost one year and had completed another EAP program at SFU prior to taking EBP.
5. Edward had been in Canada for two years and had attempted another EAP program unsuccessfully at another university before taking EBP.
6. Carmen had been in Canada for about 6 months after completing high school in China.

Although I did not ask these participants directly about socio-economic background, it is common for students in international studied to come from higher

socio-economic levels. Evidence of this can be found in the cost of international study, accommodation and travel. Participants did refer to funds coming from their parents.

Focus groups.

After several email volleys, the date of April 23rd was set for the first video recorded focus group. I planned to facilitate a semi-structured focus group using a set of questions that I had identified based on assumptions from my perspective and my teaching experience as well as my background literature review. There were six promised attendees as of the day of the focus group, but only four people participated. One person was sick and the other did not make contact with me again.

The four participants and I spoke for a total of about 50 minutes. I was amazed at how clearly ineffective most of my questions were. For example, within the first five minutes of the focus group, I was able to gather the information that amounted to 60% of my focus group questions. This was primarily information about when students believe they use first language vs. English and why. It seems that for individual cultures, Chinese and Iranian in this conversation, there is great commonality in this issue and the participants presented this to me very simply, as something that needed no further analysis or inquiry. I quickly learned I would need different types of questions to understand more deeply how students perceive their language choices.

In retrospect, this was not surprising because the original questions were based on my assumptions of the issue. This initial stage of research was very important in determining the most important aspects of the topic to question in the interview stage which followed. Once I realized that my questions were not as interesting or useful as I had thought *because* they were my questions, I used a more open and phenomenological approach to questioning. I asked which situations or contexts influence this issue in the classroom and then proceeded to expand on those ideas using the participants' responses and interactions as a starting point. For example, when a participant said that using English in a given situation was "strange", I asked more open-ended questions (why, when) in order to get the participants to get beyond the surface ideas.

I wrote initial debrief responses (Appendix A) to the first focus group to clarify my understandings and improve my facilitation technique for the next focus group, which took place about one month later. The second focus group had 5 participants. After watching both videos several times while taking notes, I identified a list of participants who seemed to have a significant amount to contribute and the linguistic ability to do so. I also identified a list of questions that seemed to warrant further investigation in a one-on-one setting. These questions were ones that received a full or excited response from the participants or brought up contexts, situations or opinions that were very different or new for me. In effect, this was an exercise in understanding what really stands out for the participants and contrasting that with my own assumptions so that I could explore new and significant areas of the participants' experience.

I cross-referenced this list of questions with the topics that were originally part of the research instrument that was approved by SFU department of research ethics to ensure that the questions fell within the parameters of the originally approved topics. The participants for the next stage were selected based on depth and quantity of contribution during the focus groups.

One-on-one in-depth interviews.

Audio recorded interviews with six participants began on June 23rd, 2010 and continued through July 14th, 2010. Each participant was given a choice of times and dates for his or her interview. The interviews took place at the SFU Burnaby campus in my teaching office. Each interview lasted 30 to 70 minutes with the determining factor in the length being the amount that the participant spoke. The number of questions was not static because often the participant would cover some of the topics after being asked very open-ended questions, but in other cases, I would need to prompt the participants with specific questions because they had little to say to only the open-ended questions.

The interviews were semi-structured and the questions were always informed by both what that participant had already said and by what other participants had said in focus groups and prior interviews. Before starting the interview, I would tell the participants two things to focus them on the experience that I am studying. First, I would remind the participants of my research question and tell them that I am studying “student experiences and understandings of choosing which language to use in ESL classrooms.” Then I told them that they

should focus on their own feelings and experiences rather than those of their classmates. At this point, I would start the interview. The questions always started with “tell me about your experiences of choosing which language to use in the second language classroom”. This often led the participant to automatically start describing situations related to some of the factors from the focus groups. (e.g. teacher reactions, motivation, classmates’ language groups, etc.). Once the participant seemed to be out of things to say, I repeated the open ended question. Then, if nothing else was forthcoming, I attempted to cover some of the other topic areas from the list made from the focus groups and other interviews. This resulted in a very organic and natural interview process because the questions flowed naturally instead of being in a set order. It allowed the freedom to explore the participants’ contributions further without the pressure of a limited order of questions. In addition, the cumulative and reflexive process of questioning was in line with phenomenology because it used the lived experience of the participants as inspiration for the question areas. Upon having covered most of the questions from the question list, I would then return to the general question inspired by phenomenology and ask the participants if there were any other ideas related to this that they thought we should cover. After hearing responses to this, I then closed the interview by telling the participants that they were welcome to contact me by email if they felt that they had something to add and I asked for permission to make further contact by email if I had further questions for them.

Following each interview, I wrote a debrief journal detailing technical, relational and topic details of the interview. I then listened to the interview and

recorded my question by question impressions of the interaction and the data. See Appendix B for an example.

Transcription.

I made a “full” transcription of all the interviews in MS Word in order to have the participants’ voices at the fore of my data analysis. It is important to note that transcription of interview or observational research data is considered problematic in many ways within the humanities and social sciences. As described by Green, Franquiz and Dixon (1997), the transcription of participant data is a “situated act”, which means that it is not free of context. It is both an interpretive and a representational process. By transcribing an auditory and linguistic event, the researcher has irrevocably changed its meaning and its purpose. In essence, the researcher cannot claim to be transcribing what the participant has “really” said, because only the participant knows what was meant (Cameron, 2001). In addition to this problem of layering the researcher’s assumptions and experience onto the text itself, when working with non-standard varieties of English (EAL learners in this case), it is necessary to take care to represent the participant’s voice in a way which is as readable, accurate and politically transparent or neutral as possible (Roberts, 1997).

As the very communicative participants were enthusiastic and confident about participation in the study, I wanted to keep their linguistic forms intact as much as possible in order to preserve the authenticity of their voices. Because these participants seemed able to communicate clearly in most cases, this seemed the

most accurate way to represent their contributions. While some scholars such as Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) point out that transcribing “error” into a document could stigmatize the participants further, I propose that to the audience of this paper, the temptation to assume that non-standard varieties of English mean less intelligent participants or less worthwhile ideas is extremely unlikely. However, if this paper were written for an audience of lay people or the general public, I might have made other choices. I did however make some changes to what I think was a largely verbatim transcription. Where utterances were very unclear to me or where grammatical, lexical or phonological variation from familiar (to me) forms made it difficult to understand the meaning of the utterance, I made some alterations to the transcript. In the case of grammatical and lexical changes, I put my assumptions about the meaning that I believed the participant was attempting to express in square brackets. Regarding phonological variation, I transcribed using traditional orthographic forms rather than a phonetic representation when pronunciation varied from the norm. This was to avoid caricature of the participants’ accents (Cameron, 2001).

While these changes may have altered the meaning of the participants’ utterances, I believe that it was the best option in this case. As stated above, there is no possible way to transcribe an interview in a decontextualized and “pure” way. All transcriptions have the interpretation of the researcher and the political positions of all participants embedded, for better or for worse. In order to lessen these influences, there are steps that the researcher can take. In hindsight I think it

might have been very useful to involve the participants more in the analysis of the data, and given another opportunity, I would definitely attempt this.

Data analysis.

During the initial transcription, I stopped the audio playback to make notes about possible “themes” in the data. The term “theme” here, and throughout this project refers to van Manen’s (1990) definition that themes are the “experiential structures that make up an experience” and give it meaning. To me, this “experiential structure” is an instance, a context, an example, or a feature of the experiences (phenomenon) that seemed salient to the participant and therefore to me based on enthusiasm, voice, clarity, frequency, and other subjective factors while we were discussing it. In addition, repetition of themes that I had already identified in single instances encouraged me to consider those ideas to be themes within the data. I kept a Word file with these notes and made changes to it as I listened to subsequent audio files. As I continued to transcribe the data, I re-arranged the themes conceptually as I started to see relationships between and among them. To maintain focus on the data and the project during transcription, it was very important to start doing some data analysis at this time.

After completing the transcription of the interviews, with a short list of possible themes that came through in the data, I listened to all the interviews again and continued to take notes on themes that seemed to be strong in individual interviews or seemed to be common among multiple interviews. When I felt that I had a satisfactory list of themes, I continued by starting to try to see relationships

between these ideas and I moved them closer to each other in the list. I also used my debrief notes to help to identify which themes were most salient/prevalent based on my initial perception of the interviews.

Following this, I proceeded to look at the transcripts and match the identified themes to statements made by the participants with those of other participants. Following a description for phenomenological data analysis provided by Creswell (2006) I performed the following procedures. While reading the transcripts, I colour coded the statements / quotations that seemed to speak directly to the themes that I had identified as important to the topic. After going through and colour-coding all of the interviews in this fashion, I returned to the list of themes/codes to review it again to try to see relationships or categories. Following this reorganisation, I cut and pasted the statements into the theme by theme organisation. I then grouped the significant statements within the themes into smaller meaning units which would go into the explication of the data results in prose. The grouping and re-ordering of the themes were based on patterns or relationships that I tried to see between them. These could be similarities, contexts, or cause/effect relationships. It took several weeks, even months, to fully understand the structures and relationships that I had begun to see while transcribing the data. I also used a graphic organiser and the descriptive and visual boxes within it moved flexibly along with my understandings. See Appendices C, D & E for examples of coded data, themes and graphic organiser.

Interpretation.

In the next step, I attempted to use the procedures recommended by Moustakas (1994), which is to explain “what” the phenomenon is (textural description) in the participants’ terms and then describe “how” (structural description) it is in their words. Finally, the aim was to integrate these two descriptions in order to explain what is called by Creswell (2006) the “essential, invariant, structure or essence”. In order to achieve this, I used the themes that I had identified and attempted to express them in prose while still focusing on the voices of the participants through quotations. I found that by synthesizing and explicating the data, I gained a deeper understanding of what the participants had said and how their ideas and experiences compared and contrasted with one another in order to attempt an essential essence of this phenomenon. I finally used this essence to make some comparisons with my own assumptions and draw some conclusions that could be applied in the classroom.

Limitations

As with all research, it is important to be cognizant of the limitations of the methodological approach and the philosophical preconceptions/assumptions employed in the research as a result of choosing this design and approach. Here I will outline some of these limitations.

Despite attempts within the methods in this approach to bracket out the researcher’s position, preconceptions and opinions of the participants, data and topics, this is, of course, impossible. Everything we see is interpreted through the

lenses of our own experiences and perspectives. The best that can be done is to attempt to be as aware of biases as possible. This awareness could be helpful in determining more clearly what is more theirs and what is primarily mine.

The extremely open-ended interview questions specified by a phenomenological approach really were challenging with this participant group. When asked such open-ended questions, I often received little in response and further prompting was needed. This could be a linguistic difficulty, but I suspect it could also have been a cultural or cross-cultural problem. The participants saw me in a teacher role, as they knew me to be part of the larger EBP community. When presented with such open-ended questions, perhaps they did not want to venture guesses. Maybe they were looking for correct answers. In order to make this possibility less of a difficulty, I provided instructions and information about my methods that attempted to ameliorate this situation. I told participants prior to beginning that my research was about their experiences and that anything they had to tell me would be useful. It is also possible that the problem was linguistic and that such a broad question just didn't have any meaning for them.

In addition, it would be possible to use discourse analysis or critical discourse analysis more fully to further break down the participants' words and see what lies beneath the surface meaning of the transcript (Cameron, 2001). I did attempt discourse analysis in an analysis of participant words used to describe the experience of using Chinese with Chinese speakers and compared those with words used to describe speaking English with Chinese speaking classmates. I also used

some discourse analysis to understand the stated purpose of the English Bridge Program. By looking more deeply into the actual words that were used and not used by participants, it is possible to gain deeper understanding of what the participants statements really mean. This type of close analysis is also useful in examining participant statements from a certain perspective, such as a critical approach.

In future studies, it might also be interesting and useful to revisit interviews/discourse with participants to clarify understandings and meanings with the participants present in order to be more sure of my own understandings of their words. This type of recursive analysis has much more appeal to me now that I have conducted research for the first time and I understand the process and the gaps better. When starting this project, the methodology which I chose seemed both appropriate and challenging to me. Now that I have more experience, I might consider a more complex method of data analysis that would allow further triangulation and deeper understanding of the data.

It might have been advantageous to work with students from the Preparation in Academic Skills (PAS) program, in which I teach. If I had been able to do so, I could have used more in-depth knowledge and relationships with the participants to the advantage of both interviewing and data analysis. However, due to ethics permissions rules, this was impossible. PAS students are generally below the age of majority (19), far away from a consenting guardian and not enrolled in SFU courses. For these reasons they are usually unable to provide informed consent to participate in a study.

Finally, probably the most interesting challenge of using this approach is that the investigation of the experience of individuals in a phenomenon that involves communication with others will never be able to focus solely on the experience of that individual. A student who is making choices about language use in the classroom is always doing so in conjunction with others. The teacher, the listener, the conversation partner, the discussion group and the class are always listening, expecting, responding and watching the participant in every communication act. For this reason, the participant cannot simply report on his or her own experience because part of that experience is always related to predicting, interpreting and understanding the context in which it happens. In retrospect, a combined research methodology of interview and classroom observation seems to have great value in this regard.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Data Analysis Introduction

I have framed my research question in terms of experiences of choices between a student's first language and English in EAL classes. However, what seems apparent after interviewing six participants is that the participants do not perceive this as a choice in the same way that their instructors might. The participants in this study seemed to understand their action of using one language or another as directed by a series of understandings or situations which are outside of them or not under their control. Their descriptions of classroom interactions with classmates and instructors and statements about the emotional experiences of navigating which language to use in their EAP classroom have led to a series of themes and understandings common to most of the participants that give a description of what it is to live this choice on a daily basis. For the participants, this experience of using/choosing, one language or another is one of being pulled in different directions. They seem to feel caught in the middle of a battle, so to speak. This echoes the dilemmas of choice found in Liang (2006). The struggle seems to be to please all sides (teachers, parents, themselves), while at the same time aligning their behaviour with their own knowledge of how English might be best learned based on past experiences, peers' stories, advice from parents, past and current teachers.

To understand more clearly how the students perceive this experience, it is necessary to delve deeper into these assumptions that they have regarding language use and learning, social life, and international student-hood. The following section

will outline some of the beliefs that seem to direct these participants' ideas about why they are pulled towards one language or another in the classroom using quotations from participant interviews. This section will analyse and give voice to the students' perceptions of more internal, emotional and self perception/identity based beliefs and perceptions such as feelings of inadequacy in English and perceptions about the purposes and use(s) of the target language. Following this, the analysis will shift to how the participants see classroom language policy, teacher attention, class type and focus, and maintaining and creating social relationships within class groups as factors which influence their behaviour or change their experience of this issue.

Mismatching Ideas/Understandings about Language: Purposes, Learning and Use

Is it possible that the struggle and confusion between teachers and students regarding which language should be used in the classroom may be the result of a very large misunderstanding between these groups? In my classroom and in the classrooms of many EAL teachers, there are assumptions at work on the teacher's part regarding the use, practice and learning of the second language. For me, first and foremost, is that language is a learned skill, bettered by practice, and that using it in communication, even when full of errors and problems, is useful for improvement of that skill. These assumptions are based on my training in Linguistics and Education and my experiences both as a teacher and as learner of additional languages (Brown, 1994). In this section, it becomes clear that this is

probably not an assumption shared by the participants in this study. The participants seem to be operating with a different set of understandings of what English is, and how to best learn it, practice it, and use it.

Of course, this is not to say that one understanding or the other is more valuable, truthful or accurate. Instead, it is important to understand these assumptions of language purposes and learning in order to better understand the question of how students might use these ideas in the classroom. This becomes especially significant when it is realized that the common practices of North American EAL classrooms (immersion theory, communicative language teaching, etc.) are in stark contrast with the experiences and beliefs of the students. This difference of paradigm could be very important in understanding student choices and behaviours, and in understanding my own assumptions and those given to me by institutions which employ me.

First and foremost, these participants do not seem to believe or experience English as a language for real communication. Many of the experiences that they shared detailed the performative (making a show) or evaluative (being tested) functions of using English. That is, they told stories of posturing, gaining advantage, and managing social status by using English. Some examples of these functions include taking IELTS exams for entry to educational program and speaking English to answer questions in large classes in high school in China. They also described avoiding using English because they felt that they were not proficient enough. These comments demonstrate an understanding that communication in English is

meant to be a smooth and perfect performance, even while they are in the midst of acquiring a new language rather than full of misunderstandings and recasts, as it often is for any users of any language. If they are going to use English, they want it to be perfect first. This might be because of their associations of English with attaining higher social status by using/learning English, especially skilfully, or a feeling of inferiority at not being understood instantly.

In the following sections, I will summarize the participants' understandings of these issues using the themes that I derived from listening to the interviews. I will also give examples of participant voices which explained what it means to choose to use and learn English. Finally, I will also contrast these understandings with my own on these topics and attempt to analyse and predict how these differing understandings might affect classroom language choice and / or my own behaviour in relation to students in the classroom.

Language group dictates language use: I can't speak English with a Chinese person!

Many of the students described how having classmates of the same language group influenced their classroom behaviour. Mei talked about moving from a school that had language group quotas and how coming to EBP at SFU caused her past confidence in speaking English in the classroom to erode. She said, "it's the situation that the institution creates for you. I mean the situation is the people around you...if they are from the same country if they don't know some words they will say their own language." She went on to say that the "most important reason is the people

who are around me.” Fiona seemed to agree that it’s easiest to speak English if not confronted with a classroom full of students from the same language group. “It’s really good to have foreign friends [other than Chinese] because we can avoid to speak our home language.” Both participants are essentially stating here that it’s not possible to speak English effectively with students of the same language background. Carmen talked about speaking Chinese with other Chinese students being “instinctive” and showed great frustration with trying to stay in English with her Chinese classmates. To Bobby it seemed completely natural and common sense to speak Chinese with Chinese classmates, “when we want to talk to our friends because most of our friends are from my mother tongue, so we speak Chinese rather than speak English.”

The participants’ statements show that they experience it as easier and maybe even the only option to stay in first language with members of the first language group. Their understanding that English is meant to be spoken with English speakers (and that for them, Chinese speakers are excluded from this group) is interesting in that may have symbolic value or links to theories of language and power. By looking at some of the words and phrases used by participants in describing the phenomenon of speaking English with “foreigners” and Chinese with “friends” the distancing becomes clear. Participants seemed to have an understanding of Chinese classmates and friends as negative or unhelpful for learning and practicing English. For example, when describing speaking Chinese with Chinese classmates, participants used words such as, comfortable, convenient, easy, used to it, home language, best friends or roommates, easy. In contrast, when

discussing trying to speak English with Chinese classmates, participants used words such as, very strange, isn't useful, can't find English word, mistakes, won't be fixed, English should be practiced (note use of passive voice – distancing), how to face English, poor guy with a strong Chinese accent, afraid, complain, weird.

What is behind this belief or understanding, implicit or explicit, that English is really to be used with speakers of English, with native speakers having highest status and most use and Chinese additional language speakers of English seeming to have the lowest attraction as speaking partners in English? To me, it seems to mirror quite precisely global hierarchies of power and privilege (linguistic, social and economic) related to language affiliation (Tollefson, 2000).

Is this idea that the native speaker is the ideal conversation partner part of a larger idealized concept of the native speaker in the lives of EAL learners? It is important to further question what the participants might mean when they say “native speaker of English”. Cook (1999) provides a historical and sociolinguistic perspective on the classification of native speaker. The category of native speaker can be defined in many ways, including proficiency, fluency, creativity or flexibility in that language. However, it is noted that the one category that is immutable is that a native speaker must learn that language as a child, as his or her first language of communication. This creates an impossible situation for EAL learners who desire native speaker status in their partners, teachers, or own English abilities – no one can change their native speaker status. Clearly, it is essential for EALs to

understand the value in being an EAL user of English and not idealise the native speaker category.

The idea of the “idealised native speaker”, as demonstrated by Leung, Harris and Rampton (1997) is ideologically deconstructed in order to see how ethnicity, nationality, socio-economic status and linguistic ability really make it more than it seems at face value. By providing an environment in which the (often) white, “native speaker” teacher sets up rules that are based upon a monolingual’s standards, the stage is being set for replication of such ideological trends and standards rather than encouraging their deconstruction or destruction.

As international students, these participants have likely already determined for themselves that Canada has an ownership of English to which they would like access. If they believed that they could really learn English in China, they might have stayed there to study in English. By becoming international students, they have demonstrated that for them, English is not only a language to be used in learning or in communication but a commodity to be bought and sold by paying tuition and an identity to be acquired by affiliation with non-Chinese English speakers. The concept of language as commodity can be interpreted as something to be possessed and owned, rather than learned and used. Is this commodity the paper (certificate/ score/ acceptance letter)? Or is it the prized identity that shows their status in the home country – international student? Perhaps this is an area for further investigation.

In Lin's (1999) description of the incompatibility of her participants' *habitus*, (linguistic expectations, experiences, understandings, etc.) with classroom reality, she could be describing what I see in these participants. They come to Canada with an expectation of a better or somehow more genuine English learning experience. When they finish, they hope that they will speak "like a native speaker." However, these expectations do not mesh with reality inside or outside the classroom. Clearly the expectation that the best and most useful practice will take place in isolation from Chinese classmates and influence is laden with political and identity significance.

However, in looking closer at the data, it is also interesting to note that there is more information about why this comfort/discomfort situation exists. What is behind it and how can it be interpreted as something useful for the learners and teachers? This belief that English is to be spoken with English speakers is only one part of the set of understandings about English that guide student language decisions in the classroom. Further to this, many other understandings about the ways in which language choice works and doesn't work as a choice follow below.

Upon early analyses of the data provided by the participants, it seemed clear that experiences of navigating language choice in their English classrooms were highly influenced by a very obvious factor - whom the students had the opportunity to speak with in that classroom. Although of course, instructors might think that students always have a choice to speak English with same-language classmates, the students do not seem to perceive the same choice. Here the participants stated that

it was the linguistic composition of the classroom that dictates (for them) the language spoken. Embedded here is the idea that it is not the speaker who decides which language to use, but rather the identity or language group of the listener/interlocutor which directs which language will take precedence. In addition, the participants say here that using English with speakers of their own language is simply not useful/possible. One participant statement that brought many of these ideas together came from Mei in talking about language choices when there was no teacher present:

So it's difficult for us to speak English in the break time because maybe some students begin to speak Chinese and maybe others will follow them and uh when maybe some students say that when you are from the same country when you speak the second language when you communicate it's strange for some people. I think this is not just a problem for the students in China we found that in that other provincial school [private school]. Then when I see some people from the same country, they will not speak the English they will speak their language. It is common for many people from the same country.

As discussed above, the participants in this study are very reluctant to use English with their same-language background classmates. One of the reasons for this seems to be an understanding that speaking English with another person from the same language background is “strange”, “awkward” or even traitorous in some way. In fact, Mei (above) refers to speaking English with same-language classmates as “strange” or perhaps perceived as strange. Fiona, although very committed to

speaking English, said that she would change to Chinese to acquiesce to her classmates desires because, “I don’t want people to feel bad.” Edward’s statement that he feels, “kind of weird” speaking English with Chinese speakers also supports this interpretation. Carmen said that she has also had the experience of feeling that others are saying or thinking, “You are a Chinese, why don’t you speak Chinese with us? What are you doing?” when she tried to speak English with them. Whether perceived or actual, there seems to be pressure both internal and external to speak first language with the first language group.

When talking about this, the participants presented it as a common sense idea. When pushed to describe it further, it was interesting to note that they often seemed to believe it didn’t really warrant further description. I knew this because when I encouraged them to justify what they said on this issue, they would repeat or rephrase, thinking perhaps that I hadn’t understood. This further underlines the idea that these experiences in the classroom are made as part of a set of beliefs and understandings that are implicit – an ideology of language.

But why does it feel so “weird” to speak English with Chinese classmates? There seem to be a few explanations of this in the data. It could be that the participants want to maintain their identities as Chinese. For example, Mei told a story about a friend who studied abroad and “forgot all her Chinese” in 4 years. This shows that she might suspect a loss of her Chinese language skills, and along with those, perhaps her Chinese identity if she uses English a lot. Carmen said, “Yeah, that’s very strange because...I DON’T KNOW WHY?! (shouting), when someone

speaks Chinese to me, I speak Chinese back. Yeah, I think just because I am a Chinese person. It is instinctive.” These statements, and the frustration or surprise shown therein suggest that she might feel an intangible or unidentifiable force which directs her back to Chinese language as part of being Chinese. Moore (2002) proposes that there may be many sociolinguistic reasons why learners in a second language environment might use first language in an AL class (code-switch). Related to the data at hand, it is likely that there is “a need to communicate that overrules the need for correctness” (pg. 283). The need to make oneself understood might overtake the transgressive feeling of rule-breaking in a so-called English-only classroom.

It seems likely that the frustration expressed by Carmen shows an internal struggle between the pull of two sides; one which tells her that she should speak Chinese and the other which tells her that this is not appropriate or allowed. So it is not only the teacher who creates and enforces the rule. It seems that English-only has been internalized by some learners and that this creates a conflict for them. In my own experience, I have walked into many classrooms after a class coffee break and had students stop speaking their first language, apologize to me (without a history of or current prompting), and then switch to English or silence. This further underlines that English-only policy is something that the students have internalized as an expectation of school life in Canada. Why is this? There must be other new classroom rules that the students have not internalized in this way; in my experience there are many. Perhaps it is evidence of the authority that English and English speakers have held and continue to hold over English second language

learners in a colonial or economic sense. In any case, it is notable in its difference and it seems to be evidence of the power of English only policy in the students' understandings of language choice.

In addition, some participants related this awkwardness to difficulties in communication of meaning or feeling. Edward said that it will always be awkward because "there is always another way you can communicate than using Chinese to speak with each other." This comment occurred in the context of discussing the quality and precision of the interactions with other students in English versus Chinese. Anne put forth the idea that it is more difficult to make yourself understood in English, and therefore when speaking to students who have less English skill, it's always more comfortable to shift back to Chinese. Here it seems that this awkwardness may be related to the lack of clarity of ideas the participants are able to communicate when speaking English.

Because when we use the Chinese I can communicate with each other easily and they will know what things I talk about because when we use English maybe some words we don't know the meaning and we just know something and we use it. (Anne)

Anne also said, "some students say why don't we use Mandarin? We can talk it more and it's more clear and we know more things and I think when we discuss some interesting topics we can use Chinese." Finally, Mei echoed this sentiment by saying that "if they don't know some words they will say their own language words and they will think it's easy to let people understand." These statements about the

awkwardness of using English with same language classmates echo themes that were common in the focus group sessions.

This idea that speaking in English is uncomfortable because of its lack of precision or authenticity with same first language speakers could be interpreted as a differing understanding of what a second language is supposed to be. Is it supposed to be equal to the first language? Is it supposed to feel the same when you use it? The participants seem to be saying here that essentially, English is not real for them in the same way that their first language is. When attempting to use it with same language speakers, the communication is always overshadowed by a feeling that it could be better, more precise and more real when spoken in Chinese. Similarly, as demonstrated by the participant quotations above, when speaking English, the precision is never really there, so it never feels good enough.

The idea that speaking first language with same-language classmates is just the “natural” thing to do and that insisting that classmates speak English is inappropriate or annoying seemed to run behind many of the participants’ explicit statements about why they would prefer to speak Chinese with same-language classmates. Explicitly, these statements did not progress beyond “because I am Chinese” (Anne). However, I believe that what may be unexpressed here is a relationship with or loyalty to the students’ origin cultural identity. As international students encounter new parts of their shifting and changing identities and identify with or resist them (English user, student at a Canadian university, person who values “Western” culture/education), these students might experience feelings of

loss or of estrangement from their original culture, especially at this early stage of their residence in Canada. Taylor's (2006) article discusses the use of Chinese in EAL classes (summer camps) as something that asserts the student's identity and creates a category of identity that leaves those not included in the Chinese language communication on the outside looking in. In this research, students were able to describe how language choice allowed them align or distance themselves from different groups. This idea that language choice serves the purposes of identity is also common in investment theory (Norton Peirce, 1995) in that students will do what is important to them. If this identity of Chineseness and connection remains a significantly invested area for them, they might speak Chinese to align themselves with it.

In addition, the naturalness of speaking Chinese with same language classmates could be linked to an ideology of nationalism. In an increasingly globalised world context (of which international university students are a prime example), the ideology of national identity is what Billig (1995) explains as the ideological condition of dividing the world into nation states above all other divisions or inclusions. He also eloquently titles this ideology as "the familiar terrain of contemporary times" (pg. 6). This idea could be of considerable interest in explaining the understandings of language choice for these students. As members of a national group ("Chinese") abroad, these students might have increased awareness of their own nationalistic identities. If one travels to a foreign country, does one not become more aware of one's own difference from the majority culture and seek out the familiar in the form of members of one's own nation? However, as

Billig tells us, national identity is not always so simple. There may be divisions and differences within the national groups. Winchester, (2004) in his book about Chinese history from a geographic and British perspective, explains many divisions and prejudices of class and geography within modern Chinese society. This reminds me that people of the same nationality do not always see each other as brethren. It may take certain actions or situations to bring them together. In order to build a strong and unified new identity of “Chinese abroad” and claim a place in that group, students may be using first language to that end because “identity is to be found in the embodied habits of social life” (thinking, using language) (Billig, 1995, pg. 8). On the other hand, the opposite of this behaviour might be to reject the group and one’s affiliation with it by choosing to use English when others are not. What would this mean aside from being a rejection of the identity of the group? It might be an attempt to posture as a high achiever or a high status user of language. This idea is also touched on by Liang (2006), when she describes the effect of “showing off” by using English.

A more nuanced analysis of how nationalism might influence language use could employ Billig’s concept of “banal nationalism” (1995). This term is used to describe the reproduction of nation-states as the norm in the western world. In applying the concept of banal nationalism to the issue at hand, it is useful to consider the following question. How is Canada reproduced as a nation in the everyday (social) occurrences of its people and institutions? Is it possible that one of the ways in which Canada attempts to assert and continue its own legitimacy and sovereignty as a nation state is through the maintenance of English (and sometimes

French) as the official and recognized language(s) of its people and places? By identifying English use with being in Canada or being Canadian, it can be seen that international students might have a problematic relationship with such an association. In taking part in such a reproduction of nationalism, what would they be getting from Canada and giving up of their own identity? How much access do these students really have to the social life of Canada? Billig also states that “national identities are the forms of social life” (1995, p. 25). If this is so, then international students might feel encouraged to speak English with local people (“English speakers”) because this social action can provide access to the banal nationalism of Canada. This identity must be something that holds some attraction for them – emotional, pragmatic or otherwise, or they would not be here.

There may also be those who would not feel encouraged to take on such an identity, isolated as they seem to me to be on campus. I note that international students tend to socialize with each other despite often voicing to me that they would like to have “Canadian” friends. If Chinese international students are under the impression that by using English, they might lose some of their Chineseness and they understand that that they are not really welcome or enthusiastic to use English, as it entails some kind of transition to Canadianness - speaking English is something that only “real” Canadians do - it is not surprising that it feels awkward for them to engage in English.

In my classrooms, this struggle with the unnaturalness of speaking English with same language classmates has been both apparent and troublesome. When first

confronted with a same language classmate, it is extremely unusual for those two students to continue speaking English together once they have ascertained that they share another language. First language seems to be an immediate connection for them, two people who were strangers only moments before. It is such a natural thing to want to cultivate that connection, especially when surrounded by foreignness, as international students and new immigrants are. I have also watched probably hundreds of students struggle linguistically in class, trying to continue to speak in English, only to realize that what they want to say can only be said in their first language because of language level, cultural knowledge or idiom.

I know that these themes of connection and communication are two themes that I have seen recurrently, but this does not explain why I believe these things to be troublesome. From the beginning of my career, I remember innumerable instances of being told or being asked how to limit first language in my classroom. English-only policy, punishments, incentives, warning letters, etc. have been used by various institutions and instructors, including in my own classroom. It was only in reading Toohey's (1998) article in which she describes the physical separation of EAL students who share a language background as "exclud(ing) (students) from just those practices in which they might otherwise appropriate identities and practices of growing competence and expertise" that I started to question the practice of English only, and think of the comfort and coping perspectives of the students. Indeed, I too have separated same-language speakers to try to keep the students in English. There didn't seem to be any other way. As an instructor who was trained

to believe in a student-centred classroom, how can I have gone so long without realizing this?

Why do we learn English?

In addition, it may be understandings of the purpose of (learning) English itself that lead the students to revert to Chinese when ‘real’ communication is needed. In the English Bridge Program, the stated aim of the program, as provided to the students, is to “develop your academic English skills and prepare yourself for credit study at the undergraduate or graduate levels” and to “learn the skills you will need to be successful in English higher education” (English Bridge Program website, SFU, 2011). These general descriptions are on the first page. On the course pages, there are more detailed descriptions of each course. The descriptions outline the specific types of tasks that the students will master in each course and the reasoning for including those tasks in the curriculum. Information about how the instructors will provide instruction, practice and evaluation is also included. An example from the Academic Culture and Communication course follows here:

Academic Culture and Communication is the *listening and speaking* skills component of the English Bridge Program. In this course, you will develop listening and note-taking strategies. You will gain experience in participating in academic discussion and giving academic oral presentations. Through skill development, practice, and self and peer critique, you will become more capable and confident in your speaking and listening abilities. (EBP Website, 2011)

If the students read this description and go through it in class with the classroom teacher in the form of a course outline, it would seem that at least an effort has been made to help the students understand that what they are undertaking in EBP is an effort to improve their communicative ability for an academic context. This is apparent from words such as “capable”, “confident”, “experience”, “development”. However, it seems that here again there are differences in the understandings between instructors and students.

Is English a tool for communication with classmates, instructors and everyone in their new communities, as teachers might assume? Or, as many of these participants seem to think, is it really a subject, a test to be passed, or a series of items to be memorized? As Mei said, “the students in the university just treat English like the exam, like math. They want to pass the exam and get a high score...don’t treat English as a language.” When asked about her own behaviour and thoughts in this area, she stated, “70% [of her focus?] was the goal to get into the university, the goal was to pass.” Here, she also did not perceive English as a tool for communication, but rather as something that she must learn or pass. Fiona seems to be saying something similar when she says, “learning [English] for Chinese [people] was for tests, not for a tool - a helpful tool for future life.” Anne said about using English in China, “it’s just a course; it’s not necessary.” Anne’s statements about how the purpose and the method of language learning are also indicative of this understanding. “In China English is not...to communicate with every person as we always learning some academic words but maybe in Canada it’s not the same so maybe we don’t know how to use it so we always afraid.”

The idea that languages might be learned in communication and not through explicit teaching and testing is still emergent and amorphous for these students. After a full semester at SFU, they seem to still have a changeable understanding of what it is to learn a language by using it. In addition, there are statements that show that the participants might see their work in EBP as preparation for the future, rather than real use of language in the present. Indeed, the name of the program “Bridge” and the one that I teach in, “Preparation in Academic Skills” tell the students that they are on their way to using English for academic purposes, but they are not there yet! However, from the self-awareness exhibited by their comments, these participants seem to be aware of a changing perception of the purposes of English.

These differences in understandings can be further complicated by a more critical understanding of the purposes of bridging programs in EAP. The assumption that such a program or test will simply “help” the students to gain the skills necessary to move on successfully to the next step – credit coursework – are somewhat naïve and simplistic. It is also important to consider the ideological and political role of such programs by taking into account their contexts and clientele. As Warriner (2007) explains, this system or rationale does not account for those who do not follow such a path to the next step. The assumption that a bridging program provides instruction that is essential to an international student’s success is faulty. There are other ways to gain access to the university as an international student. However, in the stated purpose of the program, there are clues that the students are being asked to understand that their acceptance to and success in the university

environment is contingent upon their mastery and use of English. When the EBP web page states that the program can help the student to “develop your academic English skills and prepare yourself for credit study at the undergraduate or graduate levels” and to “learn the skills you will need to be successful in English higher education”, the program is providing the participant with the assumption that he or she cannot be successful without certain skills and that the purpose of English is utilitarian (to a specific end) rather than communicative.

But what do these skills mean when the student enters the academic credit classroom? Of course, some level of competence in English is required to participate in this academic English-language milieu, but to what extent the standards of the EBP and the actual requirements of the classroom actually match is highly problematic. Students could surely find coping mechanisms when presented with classroom and homework tasks that are beyond their linguistic competence. If this is the case, then what other agendas might there be to have students participate in such programs?

It might be proposed that bridging programs could help to serve institutional purposes which may or may not also be in students’ best interests. For example, in order to maintain the university as an English-primary space, the students are encouraged to operate day-to-day in English and adopt it as their lingua franca while in Canada. This benefits the more privileged English first language users of the community by allowing them access to every communicative event, and also attempts to ensure that the university will remain a high status institution by

encouraging its participants to think of it as an English only space. These ideas are likely not in the conscious decisions of instructors or administrators, but if an analysis of the purposes and rationale of such programs is to be undertaken, it is important to look at these things from both personal and ideological viewpoints.

Using participant experiences of the EBP instructor's behaviour and words, it is possible to attempt an understanding of how the students perceive the purpose of the program / language learning based on the actions of the instructors. A few participants made statements about the actions of the instructors. Mei contrasts her "old international school" with her impression of the instructor's focus in EBP:

I think the teachers in EBP will focus on the academic teaching and the most important part is the write the essay, but in that [other] school the most important part is the communication...so many instructors [will say to those] who will speak their first language to stop speaking your first language and start speaking English and also maybe the EBP teachers will be busy in correct[ing] your essay. Sometimes they will not focus on you because I think maybe the speaking is not as important in EBP as in the [private] school. The [private] school is for the general communication.

Mei's experience with the curriculum in EBP and the methods of the instructors seems to be evaluation-focused, rather than communication-focused. This sentiment is echoed by Edward. "But for the AW [Academic Writing] teacher, his class...are always serious. So um his class we don't have much time using English or Chinese. We always using English because the things he talked about are always

related to the exam, to the homework.” And so it seems that the mismatched understanding about why the students are there prevails, although it is unclear to what extent it stems from instructors, institution, or students. Suffice it to say that it seems to exist and that it could be important to the students because it might change the students’ ideas about how to act in the classroom.

The most important effect of such a mismatch of expectations and understandings regarding the purpose of the endeavour of learning academic English is that the teachers and the students are likely applying this differing set of assumptions to their actions in the classroom. If it is true that the students and the teachers do not share common understandings on this issue, it is not surprising that both parties might find this disruptive or frustrating in maintaining English as the language of the classroom.

How do we learn English?

Another aspect of difference in understanding is the participants’ orientation toward methods to learning English and the role of error in learning. It seems that many of the participants share the idea that errors must be corrected and that memorisation and translation are good ways to practice English. Missing here is the idea that communication with same language classmates could be useful. This idea is demonstrated by Carmen’s statement that, “when you make some mistakes the other person cannot realize it.” This focus on error correction and learning for a test shows that these students have a different understanding of how language is learned than the immersion/CLT ideas that likely shape their teachers’

communication-based understandings of what it means to “learn” a language.

Further, when asked how he practiced English, Bobby stated that he “recited some sample text in English and I try to remember some vocabularies every day.”

Similarly, Mei told a story about a very successful learner who recited to the air:

Angela: do you believe that the best way to practice your English socially is with a native speaker? Do you think that's important?

Mei: Hmmm, it's important, but the practice by ourselves is also important. And I see a poor guy from a Chinese university, he came from north of China and his accent will have some strong Chinese accent, but now he speaks English very well but he did not just practice with native speakers, he said that every day he will wake up and speak English outside [alone?] loudly every day and to remember some vocabularies.

It is interesting to note here that for Mei, the idea of practicing with same language classmates does not even enter the equation. The choice seems to be between practicing with a “real” English speaker (at least not a Chinese person, at most a “native speaker” of English) and practicing alone. These stories about the benefits of non-communicative and non-contextualized practice (for vocabulary and pronunciation purposes) support the notion that there is indeed an important difference in understanding about the purpose of English and therefore about the best way to learn it. While some might say that it is useful to practice pronunciation without a listener, it is impossible to tell if that pronunciation is useful to a listener. If it is true that students believe that their communication with each other (full of

mistakes, not evaluated by anyone) is not useful to their development, then why would it be useful for students to use English at all in the classroom, unless they are doing those activities that they see as high value (evaluated, repetitive, etc.)?

My English Isn't Good Enough

Following this line of differing conceptions about the way language is learned, there is an idea in the data that unless the learner of English is able to communicate easily and or perfectly in English, the best coping strategy is to go back to Chinese. This feeling of being unable to continue in English or not seeing the value of continuing in English in an imprecise or struggling way was very common. The feelings of inadequacy expressed by the participants fell into two main categories – comparison to native speaker English and frustration at not being understood / not understanding.

As was discussed in the literature review, it is common for learners to compare themselves to native speakers of English. This comparison ultimately keeps them as permanently inferior and is unhelpful as a motivating factor for this reason. In interview, Mei said that she has a desire to:

 speak better like the as well as the native speakers then maybe I will practice try to speak English but maybe I cannot ... After several days or several weeks when I meet with some people who are from the same country I will begin to speak Chinese.

Anne says that, “because maybe English is my second language so when we talk about [with] native speakers we always nervous because maybe we don’t know this word is wrong and they can’t understand what I said.” It is very clear that the participants perceive a lack of acceptance from native speakers or an intolerance for non-native speech. Further to this, Anne stated, “you know Chinglish, it describes...the things most (Chinese) people say. Because some students want to always use some Chinglish so they are afraid to communicate with some other person.” Edward expressed this preference for native-like speech by comparing his Chinese speech with his attempts at English. “I am not feeling well if I make mistakes so it’s a kind of pressure I don’t want to make mistakes so, when I am using Chinese I never make mistakes.” Edward also said that “now, pretty much cause I passed the EBP I feel some I feel confident with my English. I feel not that bad. I feel it’s okay to make some mistakes because I am not a native speaker.” He is talking about how he feels now that he is in SFU classes and has a “high” IELTS score. This is further confirmation that being like a native speaker / or having the acceptance of an exam is more important than communicative ability for these students. Carmen continued to support this idea that the learners compare themselves to native speakers by saying that “I will feel oh I am speaking a foreign language. Oh, can that person understand me, or maybe I made some stupid mistakes.” She continued on here to describe her feelings of stress and embarrassment in these instances. Bobby also confirmed this. “The person who speaks English may ask the people who speak Chinese to speak English. The people who speak Chinese may feel shy because they

are not as good as other people.” It is noteworthy that this communication and embarrassment is happening with English speakers and with Chinese speakers.

In addition, these participants almost universally expressed that frustration at not being able to speak and make themselves understood led them back to Chinese again and again. Mei commented on her pronunciation being a barrier to her, “my pronunciation for some single words is not very correct, for me to speak when some people listen to me speak in English they cannot understand easily and they will say pardon to me or I cannot understand you.” Similarly, Fiona shared that feelings of being incorrect affect her ability and confidence in speaking English. “When I am trying to express something that I am not familiar with, I am afraid that if my expression is appropriate or correct because my view is from the language that I spoke.” This statement shows that Fiona, despite being very competent in English and having been very successful in all evaluations (IELTS, admission to university, first year courses) still feels very uncomfortable with the precision of her communication and appropriateness in English.

Is this aversion to misunderstanding and imprecise communication an indication that the students are not committed to language learning, are “lazy” as instructors sometimes see students who use their first language in the classroom (Ellis, 2001)? On the contrary, it seems that, for the student, it is acceptable, necessary and even required to break into the first language when they do not feel that their skills in English are good enough or useful enough to make themselves understood. Why might this be so? It is possible that it is really a commitment to

high standards and precision in school endeavours that might create this move to first language in the participant? Or could it be that it is simply too uncomfortable for anyone to be misunderstood (Moore, 2002)? The student seems to have three choices: remain silent, speak imperfectly and struggle to be understood, or speak in the first language. The attractiveness of the final option is obvious.

Based on what many of my own students have told me, in addition to comments made by these participants (Edward, Mei), making mistakes leads to negative feelings and pressure. This could be because these students are used to an environment where testing and evaluation are paramount, or it could be related to their current situations as visitors in a foreign country. When immersed in a new culture, mistakes are a part of everyday life. From linguistic misunderstandings to cultural faux pas, the international student must be confronted with being “wrong” on a regular basis. It therefore stands to reason that when confronted with another instance in which the student can choose to be wrong again or to be fluent and easily understood in the first language, they would choose the latter. It is imperative to attempt to understand these reactions of shame and frustration not just as reactions to individual instances of language use, but more broadly as emotional and identity-related reactions to the students’ greater context and experience. Being wrong, ashamed, and frustrated seem to be normal conditions of the international student experience, in my view. The system, which idealises the native speaker and demands that students communicate in English only, is set up to only allow for failure. Clearly, EAL learners cannot speak only in English all the time and the ideal of becoming a native speaker is unreachable, if even real.

Classroom Policy, Discipline, Teacher Time, Attention and Reaction

The participants seemed to agree with each other that the teacher's words and behaviour are important factors in how much English is used in the classroom. Most participants stated in some way that the teacher's reaction to the use of first language was important and that encouragement to use English was important, also. Mei stated that, "it's because of the program's punishment" and Fiona said that "one of our instructors in EBP, he was really strict about language, so no one really dared to speak Chinese." In addition, Anne believes that "we need to create the awareness for us because the punishment is just a way to help us use it [English]." When Edward was asked whether or not the teacher's reaction and policy influenced him to speak English, he responded that, "it covers the level you have to speak English. When that environment is removed the internal feeling (to return to first language) comes back again." Carmen said that, "especially for language teacher, he or she has the responsibility of controlling the students to speak English because if you are a language teacher I think you have to tell the students that they have to speak English." And in response to the question about whether or not it is useful for the teacher to push students to speak English, Bobby believes, "yes because sometimes we forgot that we are speaking Chinese."

Many of these statements were surprising to me because I have always made an assumption that if students wish to speak English, they will, and that forcing them to do so might be unhelpful or damaging in some way. I could feel my perspective on this beginning to change as I talked with the participants. It makes

sense that the students, at this stage in their learning (some experience with Canadian context of learning, but still coping with expectations from past experience, being young adults with emerging independence, etc.) might see the instructor as a reminding or controlling force in the classroom. In essence, this seems to be a middle road between the complete freedom that Canadian adult students might expect and the more regimented expectations of students who are younger, just finished high school and might come from a more traditional and controlled classroom context and approach to language learning.

However, these sentiments about needing to be reminded were almost always qualified in some way. It was clear that the participants had experienced certain types of teacher behaviour and student reactions that made them think some applications of an English-only policy or teacher reactions would be better than others. For example, in contrasting past EAL experiences with those in EBP, Mei explained that EBP instructors don't seem to have the time or access to monitor students adequately. Fiona noted that she understood that her teachers were often tired of repeating themselves in trying to apply the policy and that teachers should not be afraid that students will dislike them for pushing the students to speak more English. Anne also commented on relationships between teachers and students. She showed an awareness that teachers sometimes become angry when trying to maintain the policy in the classroom and that students might suffer neglect from the teacher if they choose to break the rules repeatedly. Both Edward and Fiona explained that no application of English only policy can force a student who does not wish to speak English to comply. Many of the participants expressed that the

responsibility to maintain the classroom language as English is a joint responsibility, but Edward put this very succinctly, “I think the responsibility comes from the students, but sometimes they don’t really know it’s their responsibility so the teacher took that over and to say you should speak English.”

Here the participants show a great deal of thought and awareness regarding the relationships between teachers and students and how they might be affected by certain choices that students might make and the reactions of their teachers or vice versa. This might be an indication that the students have really been affected by such events or that in discussing this issue in the focus groups, my study has lead them to think about this issue in more detail. In either case, it is important to note that the participants are aware of these dynamics. This awareness could be used to the advantage of both students and teachers if managed appropriately.

It is less clear whether or not the participants perceive this relationship as one of undue or unfair power related to linguistic and racial privilege on the part of the teachers, as has been argued by some scholars, both in applied contexts (Auerbach, 1993) or in more ideological proposals (Tollefson, 2000). Similarly, it is unclear whether or not the participants perceive any impatience with or devaluing of the first language in the reactions of their teachers, as was described in Ellis (2007). Certainly, there were few to no instances of this perception in student statements in interviews. At times, I tried to push in this direction to see if it was only shyness or perhaps my own role that prevented them from reporting on such feeling by saying, “Do you think there are any OTHER reasons why teachers might

push you to speak English?” The participants responded that the teacher maintained the language of the classroom for altruistic and pedagogical reasons. If it were otherwise, would they tell me? I am a teacher and a member of the more powerful group about which I am asking difficult questions. In the end, I am simply not able to report on this aspect of the students’ perceptions of their teachers’ actions.

Creating and Maintaining Social Relationships

As the participants in this study and almost all English Bridge Program students are young adults, far from home and family, it stands to reason that the development of friendships and social dynamics in their classroom environment is an important aspect of classroom life. It is reasonable to assume that one’s behaviour in class could dictate which students are one’s friends and the social groups that one belongs to. However, it was especially interesting to note that there was no clear directionality to the choice in this area. Some of the students saw language behaviour leading social group formation and other students saw social groups as leading language behaviour. There seemed to be three variations to this line of thinking: like language means deeper relationships, making friends with international people will help you get more English practice and wanting to be part of a certain social group (international or same-language) will motivate your language use.

As an illustration that deeper relationships lead students to speak first language with each other, Mei said that,

they know each other very well and they know what kind of person he or she is and they think that he or she will not tell teacher even though they speak their first language and they will not be scared to speak their first language.

This evidence of increasing trust was also stated by Fiona. "People get used to it and they don't want to change their partners. Even though the group of people prefer to speak different languages." (Not English) Bobby took a more pragmatic, communicative approach to this. Communication is more difficult, so with close friends he believes it's just better to speak in his first language. "Because our limited vocabulary so we can't say something we are both interested in."

Carmen saw this as a much simpler equation, "If you speak Chinese you make Chinese friends, [if] you speak English, you can make friends who come from all over the world." Anne showed an understanding that although she wants to practice English, her social ties keep her in Chinese sometimes. "I think I prefer to join the group who speaks English because I know Chinese is more easier for us and we can understand and say everything we want to talk about."

There was also a definite sense that these relationships become static and ingrained and that there is a powerlessness to fight the tide of the social group to some extent. Mei, "but after the first time they know each other", Fiona, "students make friends at the beginning," Bobby, "it's difficult to make friends when you speak English." and Carmen, "they didn't realize [pay attention to] me because I am only one person and they are four persons or five persons who are speaking Chinese, so I am very little." Here we can see echoes again of the action of language

selection not being an active choice of the students, but rather a function of their surroundings, relationships and perceptions of both.

Related to these topics of relationship building is a more group-oriented awareness of the consequences of speaking first language in the classroom. In a class that has more than one language group present, the social ramifications of speaking first language become more complicated. Several of the participants noted a keen awareness of students outside their first language group being left out when they would break into first language conversations. Fiona, in reference to non-Chinese speakers in the classroom said that “if there are several groups it will be awkward. It will not be a class, it will be several groups.” Similarly, Anne noted that some non-Chinese students had directly asked her to speak English with them instead of using Chinese; she further commented, “because they wanted to know what we said they wanted to become our friends. If we just use Chinese we cannot make a lot of friends.” Edward said that at the teacher’s prompting he would switch to English because, “that [speaking Chinese] would make them [students from other backgrounds] uncomfortable.” Carmen continued this theme as well, “if you don’t speak English and you speak your own language, those people cannot understand you and it’s not respect for them.”

As with students’ perceptions of the teacher’s reactions and their role in them, the students seem to have well-developed understandings of how their actions regarding language choice might affect the social realities of the classroom and beyond. It seems likely that social connections would be very important to

international students and newcomers. While making the most of their English practice time in class might be a priority, it stands to reason that making friends and going along with whatever classmates seem to want you to do might be more advantageous in this transitional time in the students' lives. Most of the newly arrived international students that I encounter tend to be lonely and live in transitional housing (with temporary roommates or short term homestays). It could be this isolation that spurs the students to acquiesce to pressure to revert to speaking Chinese or to speak English more when presented with social pressure from a classmate from a different background in class. This supports the idea that they are aware of language choice in managing social relationships of varying types and degrees, even if they might not always choose English to include those classmates who do not speak Chinese.

Chapter 5: Discussion & Conclusions

Differing Understandings: Blind Tug of War

The students are coming to the classroom with a set of assumptions and understandings about language learning, English dominant societies, language classrooms, teachers, appropriate behaviour, etc. What seems to be clear from my conversations with these participants is that the students experience a pulling in two different directions as a result of their time in the EBP. It seems to be the teacher's differing understandings of these ideas that creates a situation for the students in which they are constantly being pulled in two directions (or more), asked to choose, and required to submit.

As a result, there is conflict and chaos (both internal and external) which can be created for both teachers and students by this dichotomy of understandings. I have often been torn between my simple and inadequate understanding of the students' perspectives on the issue and my own ideas of what I believe to be best practices. Students also are torn between the ideas of what language learning might be in an English dominant society with a "native speaker" teacher and what they know to be true based on their past experience and beliefs. It will be seen that these misunderstandings can be distilled into three main areas – role of the teacher in guiding and restricting language use, student understandings of what it means to learn and use English as their second (additional) language, and how shifting and hidden learner identities affect students' ability and desire to use English in classroom or "social" milieus.

Here, in summary, are the assumptions that the students are making along with some of my beliefs from my pre-research disclosure (bracketing) journal to contrast.

What is English?: Who, Where and Why?

As seen in the analysis of the data from this study, many of these participants see learning English as a step to something else. Of course, as students who have recently left a bridging program, it is true that they will soon use English in a much more authentic way, to study in an academic context. However, in their English Bridge classes, they had many opportunities to communicate with great authenticity (from my perspective) with their classmates, teachers, and indeed with other members of their communities. It became clear from talking with these participants about their experiences that they perceive these opportunities not as real, valuable and authentic opportunities, but as somehow substandard, false and un-useful. The participants have an ideal of their English practice and how it should manifest in their studies here in Canada. The ideal seems to be conversation with people who do not speak their first language, and more specifically with someone that they identify as a “native speaker”. Anything else is not as useful or desirable. As students in a “bridging” program, they seem to see themselves as marginalized and perhaps as stigmatized or “less” than adequate. Why would they choose to practice with others who are in the same category (Leung et al., 1997; Waterstone, 2008)?

Comments on these issues were present in my “assumptions” journal which I wrote prior to beginning my research with these participants. I noted that with a

communicative language teaching background, it had been my belief that any communicative practice in English is of value to all EAL learners. However, my perspectives regarding language practice in the classroom lack the specificity of the participants' perspectives. I did not take note of the emotional element present in language choice. I saw it mostly as a function of language background, rather than preference. I also wrote that the cultural makeup of the class must affect which language students choose to speak during class time because communicative necessity will dictate language choice in a practical way. However, the participants' mentions of a "natural" feeling when speaking with people who do not share the Chinese first language hints at some awareness of this issue of naturalness in speaking first language with speakers of the same first language on my part prior to the data collection.

I also suspected that there must be some decision-making related to the teacher's language background. I thought that the language(s) that the teacher speaks must influence the comfort of the learners in speaking either the target language or the first language. This is to say that sharing a first language with the teacher should make it easier to code switch in communication with the teacher. However, the students might not feel as comfortable using first language with classmates (especially off task) if the teacher can understand them, just as a teacher who does not share the students' first language could be excluded from first language student conversations intentionally or unintentionally. A teacher who does not share the students' first language also forces the students to use the target language. It is interesting to note that this issue, although explored in my

assumptions journal, really did not come up in my conversations with these participants. In focus group, when we discussed language learning in home countries, it was clear that in China, the students had studied English “in Chinese” with teachers who were native speakers of Chinese in high school and in some private language schools, but no one ever mentioned a teacher who was a member of their first language group attempting to teach them in English. This idea was so foreign to them that it didn’t seem to warrant discussion. The reasons why it might be so far from an interesting topic to the participants perhaps warrant further investigation in future research. There are many Chinese EAL instructors who I know suffer under-employability in this labour market. The fact that they do not share the “native speaker” cachet, racial or linguistic, and that they would be able to “eavesdrop” on their students when they slip into first language conversations might make them especially unattractive to students and therefore to employers. This might be the case, despite the fact that they likely have many perspectives and knowledge that would aid them in instructing a group largely composed from a similar language background (e.g. grammatical, cultural knowledge). I note that this perspective of mine may come from an experience early in my career when a Chinese-Canadian teacher colleague was sent back to the office by a Chinese client family with the message that they preferred a “Canadian” teacher.

Fearing & Loathing English

At the same time, while desiring more authentic “native speaker” and “Canadian” opportunities to speak English, many participants mentioned feeling

fearful and nervous about engaging non-Chinese classmates and non-Chinese speakers outside the classroom. The fear of being misunderstood due to pronunciation, grammar or vocabulary problems often outweighed the desire (expressed above) to achieve what they perceive as “real” practice both inside and outside the classroom. I believe after talking with these participants that many instructors (including myself) greatly underestimate the fear and trepidation present in their own classrooms. An unwillingness to speak in English or to switch from the native language is often perceived by instructors as non-compliance, refusal and/or wilfulness, as noted in the literature review. However, from my own observations while teaching, it is clear that sometimes this fear of being seen as unsuccessful, unclear, struggling, or hesitating is terrible for learners of English. The sheer ease of saying something in their first language is too seductive to leave. The nerves of steel and effort required to take risks consistently and constantly in front of and with others might be too emotionally difficult. Who would do that? Why? I feel great empathy for my own students here.

In reading Pavlenko (2002), we can see that this idea of emotional stress and distress may be more or less than it seems to me. In contrasting how emotions are expressed across languages and cultures, Pavlenko highlights that it is dangerous to make assumptions in this area. The ways in which emotions are experienced and expressed appear to differ greatly from context to context and individual to individual (based on language and personal history). Further research in the area of emotion and additional language learners would be interesting and useful.

My assumptions journal also proposed some ideas related to feelings about English practice in the classroom and outside. I noted that personality and emotion might have something do with language choice. I wrote that personal qualities and habits related to risk-taking, shyness, self-esteem, confidence, talkativity, self-concept as student, social group, etc. may also have an effect on which language is chosen and when. I also seemed to be aware of potentially damaging experiences in learners' backgrounds that might make them fearful. However, it is notable that there are few references to emotion or anxiety in particular in my assumptions journal. I suspect that this might be one reason why I chose the phenomenological approach for this research. It makes sense now that I might have wanted a window into the emotional realities of the lives of the learners. I was missing this perspective and information which I craved to try to understand how my students make their choices in the classroom.

The "loathing" of English is another level of the fear, I believe. As Lin (1999) puts it students are, "also likely to have an ambivalent, want-hate relationship with English, and the classroom becomes a site for their struggles and oppositional practices" (p. 394). Participants in this study described using English as "strange", "awkward", "frustrating", "unclear", and "embarrassing". Of course, they are not only afraid. The fact that they are here in Canada learning English is likely not entirely due to their love of language learning. In fact, after talking with these participants about why they came to Canada, (often off-tape, and from information revealed in and after focus groups) it is clear that many of them are here in Canada to learn English not because of any particular attraction to North American culture

or the English language, but rather because it will be advantageous to their academic and employment futures. In Fiona's words, "I can see the point they sent us here so we really have to cherish because our platform (social status) is really higher." She refers to why her parents wanted her to study in Canada and how it will increase her status over her whole life, no matter where she lives. As one of the most introspective participants, Fiona has expressed that she explicitly understands the value of learning English for her future. In the other participants, the pressure is high to learn English and the investments in learning are often not intrinsic or immediate. They are investing in their futures. This follows Norton's (1995) understanding of investment in language learning as a function of what students may gain from this learning now or in the future, which is a reflection of shifting and changing identities within the language learner. Essentially, who the learner feels him or herself to be will line up with what he or she does. In addition, Norton (2001) in Kanno and Norton (2003) states that the concept of "imagined communities" analyses investment with an orientation towards future and possibility for learners. However, I contend that futuristic investments and imagined communities might be less immediate and emotionally satisfying than more current ones.

This can be contrasted with assumptions that many instructors might make, as monolinguals and perhaps monoculturals of a high status and privileged group. It is common for North American Anglophones to undertake language study out of cultural or linguistic interest. One might study French or Spanish (as I did) in order to access future travel opportunities, learn about a culture, or seem to have a broad

education. Canadian Anglophones who learn French in order to gain career advantage through bilingualism in both official languages might be similar to Chinese students who come to North America to gain advantage for their futures in some ways. However, those Anglophones are still part of the dominant language group and therefore the most powerful one, so the comparison is really not equal. All this is to say that monolingual Anglophone teachers, who might mistakenly equate their own language learning experiences with their students', may not really understand their students' emotional reactions to learning and using English. The political and power relationships between languages are complex and it is not easy to step outside one's own background and perspective to understand another's purposes for learning English when that person comes from a completely different linguo-political context.

Identity and How It Changes Language Use

Of course, these political positionings, emotions, and understandings of language learning can all be related back to identity. Who these learners perceive themselves to be in a given moment in the classroom will influence their reactions. Postmodern conceptions of identity in language learning allow for shifting and changing ideas of self in relation to the additional language (Nero, 2005). Of course, as an additional language is learned, the multiple identities of the learners might shift away from or towards the target language depending on the situation. Brown's assertion that learning a new language is essentially learning a new culture (1994) seems overly simplistic to me, as there must be intervening stages of increased

distance from the new culture as stages of culture shock (Pedersen, 1995) and individual experiences make for trying times, as detailed in many places throughout this writing.

That said, learners who are negotiating this path towards English in an academic preparation context may still be on their way to acquiring a new culture and therefore a new identity. If we look at all of the experiences and perceptions of choosing to use English or first language in class as bumps on the path to forming that new identity as a rightful, skilful, and confident English speaker, user, and learner, identity theory can help to understand the difficulties that learners face in making choices that will serve often conflicting identities and investments. Liang (2006) discusses in detail the dichotomous investments and identifications that students face daily in this endeavour. She mentions language maintenance, developing linguistic versus content skills, and negotiating the social world of the classroom as dilemmas. In this study, it seems that understanding the purpose of practice, overcoming discomfort (cultural, language anxiety, etc.), negotiating the classroom rules, understanding the teacher's perspective, coming to terms with their own investments in learning English, and gaining linguistic confidence are experiences that require students to shift or acquire new identities in this new learning environment.

The problem lies in that many teachers might not understand this. From a teacher's perspective, indeed sometimes from my own, "some students are more interested than others in learning and improving their English." This insinuates

that students who often choose first language in the classroom are actually less interested in their own learning and less invested in learning English. This does not give much credit to the students and instead takes a perspective that students who do not speak English all the time in class are not good students or are disobedient or unmotivated in some way.

The Rules: Teacher's Role in Maintaining the Language of the Classroom

From the statements made by the participants in this study, it is clear that many of these participants see a need for the teacher to create an English language learning environment if the learners are to use English in the classroom. They perceive that they cannot do it alone and that if they are left to make the choice independently, they will speak their first language with first language classmates in many situations for a variety of reasons which are detailed in other sections. In addition, the participants have varying perceptions of what did work in the classroom in terms of policy, rule-making and enforcement. For this reason, their perspectives on the best strategies might be diverse. The only constant was that it is indeed the teacher's job (what they are paying the teacher to do) to maintain the language atmosphere in the classroom to some extent, but that not all strategies worked well.

There seemed to be several elements to maintaining English in the classroom that came up to varying degrees during the interviews and focus groups. One theme that came up repeatedly was that of "reminders" and "jokes" instead of punishment. The message seemed to be that a softer or good-humoured approach worked well to

get the students on side with practicing more. In addition, the focus of the class seemed to be important. There was a feeling that when “serious” topics were being discussed, it was easy to maintain the language of the classroom, but that when there was more flexible time (group, pair work, etc.) and the focus came away from the teacher, the students found it more challenging to speak in English. In addition, it was noted that if students do not wish to speak English for their own reasons, no policy will be able to get them to do that.

My assumptions on this part of the issue were remarkably similar to what the participants described in this area. I found myself agreeing with them in the interviews and this was the point within the interviews in which I often felt my own perspectives somewhat interfering with my attempts to ask extension questions to the participants. Here it was very difficult to maintain the wall between my own feelings and assumptions and what the participants were saying. I feel that it is necessary to disclose this to be accurate, but also because these topics are very close to my own teaching practice and ego as a teacher.

The reason I chose this topic is that it is a genuine question which has come to the fore due to my own practice and reflection in the classroom and critical studies in graduate coursework. In my journal, I stated that when students are forced by policy to speak the target language, it creates a few problems. However, upon closer analysis, it is interesting to note that I did not really describe this position from the student’s perspective. It was definitely from the teacher’s. I thought that enforcing English-only policy creates a relationship between students

and teachers of enforcer versus transgressor. Instead of a partnership or a mentor/mentee relationship, the teacher must take on the role of policing the policy. If the policy exists and the teacher abdicates the responsibility of enforcing this policy, the teacher seems weak or negligent. I also thought that students who are subject to such a policy must hide from teachers and administrators in order to speak in their first language. This means that doors will be closed, notes will be passed, extra long breaks will be taken. This also prevents the teacher from knowing how much first language is being spoken or used and for which purposes. These assumptions are in contrast to the student experiences that I learned about in the interviews, such as feeling that students who get caught speaking first language will perhaps not be liked by the teacher and might therefore receive less attention or poorer evaluations from such a teacher. Here again, we revisit apparent misunderstandings between teachers and learners about the meaning and usefulness of policy, rules and punishments. How can we learn to understand each other better on this issue?

Chapter 6: Implications & Concluding Remarks

Understanding Our Students: Communication

What can we do as teachers and researchers? What should we do? After the experience of trying to conduct phenomenological research with a group of participants in a program similar to the one in which I teach, I understand that the experiences of our students are actually poorly understood by teachers and administrators in many cases. I base this finding on conversations with my colleagues and my own prior assumptions about the students' understandings and motivations regarding language choice. Policies and classroom applications of those policies are usually made from the teacher/administrator perspective with a less than adequate understanding of how those policies impact or interact with learner situations, experiences, identities and the like.

Consulting the students: Why?

This means that when deciding on policies or their classroom applications, consultation with students could be very valuable. If the goal is to have all students use as much English as possible in an invested way and for reasons of personal agreement, then using the students' ideas and buy-in to the use of English would be very useful. By approaching this issue as a conversation between instructors and students in the early classes and when revisiting the topic, there is greater likelihood of instructors understanding their students' investments, hesitations and previous experiences and how these might affect the languages chosen in class. It

will also help the learners to become increasingly aware of the teacher's expectations and the reasons (assumptions) behind those expectations.

Consulting the students: How?

This could include everything from explanation of the teacher's pedagogical appraisal of language use in the classroom to disclosure of emotions related to frustration at having to repeatedly tell students to speak English. Through open communication on this issue to begin classes and on an ongoing basis, the teacher and the students can build understandings of this issue together. In this way, learning about the students' perspectives will build up the teachers' knowledge of the students' ideas and experiences over time. This can be achieved by using a student elicited approach to classroom codes of conduct. It is essential that students understand and take ownership of the procedures that will make up their learning, otherwise the teacher is simply replicating rules without context for the students due to the differing understandings about purpose, process, goals and investments outlined throughout this writing. Teachers who go ahead with a replication of policy without significant discussion run the risk of replicating and entrenching assumptions and reactions that are not helpful to students' choice of language in the classroom because the students are not aware of the bases of these assumptions or the students' own assumptions of language choice are not in line with those of the teacher.

It is also imperative that the teacher engage the students in ongoing dialogue about language use. To encourage students to use more English and encourage use

of the first language at the same time could be very confusing. In my own classroom, I have used several activities to attempt to access and encourage dialogue on this issue with students. Non-judgemental, open discussion of language use and what is appropriate or useful and when is both necessary and revealing. It is interesting to me that the students often seem to have not yet considered this issue very much upon arrival in my classroom, and I believe this speaks to the necessity for discussion. The diversity of perspectives is also often remarkable. I have used “language use journals” or “logs” in which students note how much, when and where they use each language outside or inside the classroom along with feelings associated with these situations. I have also facilitated a workshop entitled “Living your life in English” which focuses on elicitation of the students’ goals in studying abroad, their expectations of language use, and what they see as the opportunities for English use in a Canadian context. These activities are also expanded with explicit discussion of their opinions of speaking English with classmates from the same language background.

Teacher Education.

A reflective approach to building classroom practices and codes of conduct might not come naturally to all instructors. Therefore, it is important for new teachers and those participating in professional development be introduced to and provided with opportunities for practice with student-centred, collaborative and inquiry-based approaches to classroom management. Especially with adults, it stands to reason that conversations about why we should have certain rules, how

they might affect learning and whether or not the participants believe they are worthwhile could be useful in teaching.

In working on this study, I have realized that many of the ideas that I learned about in my undergraduate preparation to become a teacher included information about how to manage classes in a culturally sensitive and equitable way. However, it is my belief that without a classroom to apply these ideas to and living, breathing students to know, understand and communicate with, such lessons are largely lost. In addition, the institutional pressures of managing a classroom in a certain way and following the rules (including maintaining order and control in the classroom) likely prevent many teachers from applying their more critical opinions and knowledge when teaching.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations to this study. First and foremost was my position as an outsider to the participants. Despite the fact that they knew me slightly from my role as an instructor in a similar program, I was very far away from these participants culturally, positionally (teacher/students, adult/young adult, member of academic community/aspiring member), experientially, etc. If I were to undertake this sort of research again, I would like to know my participants better and have closer relationships with them in order to understand their perspectives more clearly (as I would understand them) and to have them perceive me more as an equal instead of as an expert, researcher, authority, etc. I also believe that a longer-term exposure and inquiry with the participants would be beneficial. It might

be useful to have them take part in classes and report repeatedly on this issue while bringing fresh experiential data to interviews.

By having a closer, more equal and longer-term relationship with the participants, several benefits might be achieved. I might increase the trust in the relationships and be able to access feelings or opinions that would otherwise remain hidden or simply unsaid. In addition, I might come to understand my own assumptions about the participants and the issue better, as they might understand mine, thereby learning where our understandings of the issue really diverge and overlap. However, it is also possible that there might be little to gain from this type of change.

Furthermore, my professional position as a sessional instructor in the department in which EBP is situated was a limiting factor in my analysis of the data and in my freedom to write with impunity about the phenomenon and my understandings of the participants' perspectives. As a member of this community it was necessary to attempt to reveal the ideas as clearly and honestly as possible while still maintaining an awareness of the politics and risks of writing these ideas as a member of this department. I have tried my best to do so, but this must still be considered a limitation of the study.

Of course, the participants themselves (a mono-cultural, small group) were one limitation of this study. In order to get a fuller picture of this issue that might be more transferable to other contexts, it would be useful to carry out other studies with an increased variety of participants and a larger sample size. On the other

hand, an ethnographic case study or another approach which would allow deeper inquiry might also provide a clearer and more interesting understanding, rather than focusing on breadth.

In addition, other methods of data collection, analysis and approach to research could help to give a fuller picture of this issue to the research community. I was interested in the participants' experiences of this phenomenon with some degree of isolation. I was looking at the perceptions of the participants because I believe that their conscious decisions about language use are useful in understanding why they make certain choices and not other ones. That said, this is likely only one piece of a very large puzzle. It is possible that there are unconscious aspects to these decisions which might be observable in classroom contexts, or that by interviewing teachers on this topic, we might gain perspectives that could give a fuller picture and clarify our understanding.

Although it was beyond the scope of the present study, I also feel that identity theory is very important in understanding how and why learners make certain choices regarding language use in the EAL classroom. I would like to undertake some research which deals more explicitly with identity and how students perceive themselves in relation to this issue. Of course, this aspect was touched on during my analysis, but I did not have an opportunity to question participants about this aspect directly, most likely because it is a theoretical construct that is not salient to them. Because my questioning was based on things that they already perceive, it never came to the fore in my research.

Of course, one cannot do everything all at once. As researchers, we must resist the temptation to try to answer all questions and provide answers to all who query simultaneously. It is important to choose an approach for a reason while remaining cognizant of the fact that it might not cover all facets of a topic. At the same time, using what we learn in each project about how to choose that approach, participants, design, etc. to inform the next project is optimal.

The phenomenologist does not present the reader with a conclusive argument now with a determinate set of ideas, essences or insights. Instead, he or she aims to be allusive in orienting the reader reflectively to that region of lived experience where the phenomenon dwells in recognizable form. More strongly put, the reader must become possessed by the allusive power of text – taken, touched, overcome. (van Manen, 2002, p. 238)

I sincerely hope that this is the effect of these writings. While it has been very challenging to me to avoid analytical argumentation, I think that the participants' voices take the primary place in this research. I hope that my voice has been interpretative and useful in understanding and contextualizing their experiences.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Focus Group Notes

Focus Group #1

Attendees: Right to left: Mei, BH (1 year), Fiona (8 mos), Edward (Attended U of A)
2 years in Ca

Intros to 4:20

Experience learning English: to 8:58

There is a difference between “studying English” and “really working hard at English”

The skill focus and teaching methods change your learning and your behaviour. (For test, for communication with real people, for a future goal you care about.)

Activities outside of school and contact with English speakers changes your orientation towards language.

Is it necessary to use FIRST LANGUAGE?

Sometimes it's necessary to speak FIRST LANGUAGE, but it's better not to. Some disagreement about this.

- Cultural differences/ misunderstandings
- Special situations – not understanding complex vocabulary
- It's better to use English
- We must speak English so avoid excluding people (said by the lone Farsi speaker). He was happy that he had no one to talk with in Farsi.

Special situations for FIRST LANGUAGE use:

- Emotional difficulties

How does it feel to use FIRST LANGUAGE in class? China

- It's a release
- In China, speaking English is a high pressure situation. You are using English to answer questions

Language of instruction:

China: Chinese

Iran: English?

How does it feel to use FIRST LANGUAGE in class? Canada (they are more shy and evasive here)

- Academic schools don't have diversity?
- It was uncomfortable because she knew there were non-Chinese being excluded
- Mei expresses empathy for the linguistic exclusion and Fiona nods. Phil giggles.
- B talks about the clear efficiency of speaking FIRST LANGUAGE
- Fiona really wanted to speak English only – it's awkward to rebuke others, and sometimes I felt lazy. Ended up changing back to English when she became aware of what she was doing.
- Fiona experienced benefits (social) from speaking English
- Phil says this is not a linguistic issue. It's cultural and social.

How does it feel to speak English with another person from the same culture/language group?

- In China, it's weird, but here, it's ok/good.
- I can't see the emotion in my L2...I need to speak FIRST LANGUAGE to connect with someone from my own culture.

How did you manage to change the language of the classroom?

- Be direct. Personality is important. (Fiona)
- Going with the flow linguistically is important. (Phil)
- Hang out with the right people (who don't share your FIRST LANGUAGE)
- Joke with them in their own language. It works

English only policy

- Signed a contract
- But...we used our language "under the table" "an open secret"
- It's interesting that they really can't remember much about the contract
- Sometimes teachers stopped us. Yelled. Asked for consideration because they couldn't understand. Sometimes teachers ignored FIRST LANGUAGE, especially if it was quiet.
- Fiona – teachers were patient.
- Professional instructors, serious face, strict, strong rule enforcer? Anger at speaking in FIRST LANGUAGE. Phil thinks it's a good thing. Teachers who keep encouraging English are patient. (Rather than giving up on encouraging students.)
- B- Different classroom activities and different locations change the way policy is enforced.
- Quiet English is ok in some classrooms

- Part of the duties of an instructor is to push students to use English. However, empathy is expressed for the teacher that this is really hard to maintain over time.
- Maybe teachers empathize with how hard it is for students.

What happens when students try to negotiate and influence each others' behaviours

- Teasing, scolding, realizing it's hard to maintain L2. (they need tools for this)
- Fiona: Everyone is eager to speak English, but it's awkward and embarrassing to be the first one. (Geek fear)
- They are waiting for someone to start

Why is it embarrassing?

- Accent is embarrassing (Mei)
- They don't want to make mistakes. Making mistakes is a reason to be punished.
- Group speaking FIRST LANGUAGE is in convenient situations.

The L2 only student..how do other students think of that student?

- Admiration for them
- They are odd, strange
- It's good, but after class it's weird. Uncomfortable.

What do you think of a teacher who abdicates responsibility for this issue? Does not enforce policy.

- Depends on situation or goal. Independent work, grammar work, it's useful.
- If a teacher does this always, they are not engaged in class.
- It's not the teacher's problem. They can't control everyone. It's impossible to enforce really. It's very hard for the teacher.
- P: 10 weeks is a short time to change a person
- It's the students' responsibility. (Fiona)
- Mei agrees...instructors can't take the responsibility. The instructors can show them how to follow the policy.

Appendix B: Interview Debrief

Debrief for Mei – Interview #1 – June 23, 2010

- 1) Pre-interview. The interview took place in my office at the pre-arranged time. The sound quality seems good on the recording. I have decided to use only audio recordings. The timing of this interview was a little awkward. Mei had a 90-minute window before her class at 11:30 a.m. However, at the last minute before the interview, some classmates asked her to meet to go over an assignment before class. We cut the interview at 50 minutes in order to allow her time to do this. We also discussed meeting again to extend our conversation on a few interesting points. (to follow)
- 2) I was surprised that I was not able to control this conversation better. It seemed really all over the place. Perhaps on second listening, I can extract the questions in order and use that in my other interviews to increase the consistency for ease of analysis and repeatability.

I was surprised when a few new topics came up at the end of the interview. It seems we have more to talk about. I was also surprised that Mei talked so much about the experiences of others. I kept trying to redirect her to her own experiences, but my impression was that this is something that students experience in communities, so their experiences are inextricable from their classmates'. It's relational?

It was also almost impossible to focus this conversation on only what happens in the classroom. It seems that to Mei, the whole experience of being here and struggling with English is holistic. Sometimes it seemed that Mei did not really understand what I was asking. This may be because I shifted my questions to a slightly less plain language version (experiences, contexts, situations, etc.) to try to keep it in line with phenomenological stuff.

There is a hitch with one word – provincial / private school? Just when I thought I knew what she was really saying, it seemed to change.

Question by Question:

1. Explaining the phenomenon – general experiences in ESL
 - It surprised me when Mei launched straight into punishments. We talked about the language groups in the classroom, but we hadn't talked about punishments in FG. It was interesting that she thought this was so important. Perhaps she has been thinking about it since.
2. Talking about the phenomenon in EBP.
 - Mei's view was that EBP does not focus on speaking! This was surprising. She also sees SFU as too big an area to "police" for

- language use outside of class. Here the interview becomes more about real time and outside the class.
3. Breaking the rules. Speaking your first language.
 - It was hard to speak English as first, but she worked really hard. (I find it hard to believe that she never broke the rules, but this seems to be her perception.
 4. What happened in EBP?
 - Teachers in EBP were not focused on speaking and communication! (hmmm)
 - Younger students are more motivated because they are here for their future. (This is not my experience) Her experience was with a private party-school?
 - Mei says that the goal is really important – it changes your motivation?
 5. Did strict rules help you? Was that their purpose? (9:27)
 - Yes, but it was overshadowed by the makeup of the class.
 - Smaller classes helped the teachers to pay more attention to what the students were doing,
 6. The factors that drive your choice?
 - “the people around me” She says that the school creates the situation. She has an idea that quotas are in place and driven by admin? This is interesting.
 - Awkward feeling of speaking E with other Chinese. Influence from other students. Here the relational nature of this issue comes out. The decision to use English is not made by one person.
 7. Influence of variety of English – her opinion
 - Easy to understand Chinese English, but we can’t improve / correct. – Does she understand the benefits of practice.
 8. Pressures to speak English.
 - the first thing to come out is that failure to communicate will push her to want to communicate. – but she sees lack of foreign contacts as a barrier to practice.
 - She was sometimes inspired by hearing others speak – in class, Chinese with good accent, CBChinese speakers. (She seems to be focusing in on the perceived benefit of NS English.)
 - There is fear of going back to China with “bad English” (wasting time). Students don’t perceive their own progress?
 9. Differences between schools – hm, physical spaces make a difference. The small school seems to feel like a smaller community? I never thought of this before.
 10. How important is break time?
 - English should be spoken at break time. It’s a long time. (I am surprised that she doesn’t feel she needs a break.)
 11. Did you get in trouble for speaking FIRST LANGUAGE? Did hiding change your relationship with the teacher.

- Explained others' punishments. She was hiding her FIRST LANGUAGE speech from the teacher. Perceives no effect of this hiding. 10—20% of time.
12. What would the teacher do if the students speak FIRST LANGUAGE in class? Relationship with teacher?
- She talks about students getting ignored by teachers. It seems that when there is a rule, the teacher has a reason to be mad, maybe?
 - She seems off topic here. The topic of goal comes up again. The word tool is used a lot here. I am not sure what this means to her. Perhaps it's not good in direct translation. She starts talking about exams. This seemed to come up without a question. Her speculations on changes in education in China are interesting.
13. What did you understand about goals, communication, language learning in EBP?
- she only understood a bit. She reveals that there is not a lot of long term perception. The first step is just a step. This long term planning thing could be important.
14. Do you think it's important to talk with a native speaker?
- Wow! She doesn't seem to see any options between talking to yourself and talking with a NS. The idea of good practice with a NNS doesn't seem apparent to her. She mentions a lot of strategies about recording and practicing accent, but not communication!
15. Social things – making mistakes in class?
16. Social benefits – not much here....surprising. I really had to push her to interpret this situation. I am so surprised that she doesn't seem to see that she might push others away by speaking Chinese. She continues to talk about NS and ignores the idea of speaking English with other Chinese speakers. Opportunity to make friends comes up again. Cost of rez is prohibitive even though it can provide perceived road to success.
17. What can the teacher do? (before / after infraction)
- she perceives that it's not always in the teacher's control
 - respect for teacher
 - I really had to prod her to get her to remember this
 - Rule introduction only. – punishment focus. It's interesting that she perceives such fear here. Instead of a choice, the students are afraid? When students know each other, the fear disappears. It seems that there is an adversarial relationship developing here.
 - She does come up with the practice argument, but not for a while. And she says that students expect more improvement but can't see it so get frustrated!!
18. Other issues
- Who is around it important to this. Students know they are coming to a place where they will not need to speak??
 - Faculty too?
19. Can policy be too strict?

No, policy is helpful, but classroom makeup is more important, and population. I sense some grass is greener here.

20. What is it that makes people want to speak with each other in a certain language. - someone's cultural background.

21. Further talking - Chinese English exams. (her idea) - Chinese English (my idea) - Cultural connection? (our idea).

Appendix C – Coded Interview Data Sample

Mei: June 23, 2010

Again, remember everything you say to me is private, I am recording it so that I can transcribe it later and analyse what you say.

Ok

But for the most part, I hope we can ignore the recorder

...

when you don't have to speak English. Do you know what I mean by that?

You mean the first time speaking English?

No, I mean I want to talk about how it feels and what happens in a class like EBP when you have a choice, when you have a friend or a classmate beside you who can speak your first language with you, but you need to choose to speak English because the class is in English. Do you see what I mean? There is a choice?

I think it's because of the program's punishment. For example, when I first came here and the school/college all the students speak their first language more than the third times they will be quit from the school, so they speak English even though they are not like the teachers or the instructors when they speak their first in that school there are not so many students from the same countries. And I think maybe each country keeps at 20% of students and so when I first in that class I very shy to speak English, in front of so many people, but when I stayed there for a long time I found active in that class I found some opportunities to speak English in that class and practice

ok, so you are talking about the language groups of the students

yea

and you are talking about the punishment

yea

about having a rule

yea

and this was at a private language school?

yea

so let's talk about what happened in ebp. how was that different?

I think it's quite different because the ebp in university and the teachers and the instructors cannot focus on the students what they speak. maybe at the breaktime they will go to their office to have some short break any way hesitates there are also many Chinese students in ebp, so it's difficult for us to speak English in the break time because maybe some students begin to speak Chinese and maybe others will follow them. and uh

when maybe some students say that when you are from the same country when you speak the second language when you communicate it's strange for some people. I think this is not just a problem for the students in china we found that in that other provincial school. Then when I see some people from the same country, they will not speak the English they will speak their language. it is common for many people from the same country.

Appendix D – Coded Themes

MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT LANGUAGE, LEARNING, CLASSROOMS, TEACHERS DUE TO CULTURE.

Language groups represented → Speaking FIRST LANGUAGE is inevitable because of own and others behaviours and expectations about language purpose, use and learning (Contact with others from the same lang/culture background results in “lack of opportunity to speak English”, test focus), lack of understanding of the student-centered classroom?,

Inability to separate school and outside.

I can't speak like a native speaker & My English is not good enough / fear of misunderstanding. (levels are important here) anxiety? Identity here?

Using English outside makes classroom communication rationale solid

Native speakers are the only worthwhile practice partners

IT'S NOT A DECISION. IT'S ABOUT BEING PULLED IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS.

Type or focus of class drives behaviour

Future goals or reason for being in Canada

Awareness of leaving out non-Chinese students

Punishment as useful / monitoring is (un)necessary - Teacher time, attitude and focus

Maintaining and creating social relationships.

Positive role models drive English use

Fear of overall English failure in the eyes of home country.

Classroom is a safe place to speak Chinese (outside is not as safe) &

Appendix E – Graphic Organizer

Student understandings of language choice in the EAP classroom

