



## Second Language Learners' Identity toward Their Home Culture: Adding Pragmatic Knowledge to Language Learning Curriculum

Lu-Fang Lin

Institution of Applied English

National Taiwan Ocean University, Taiwan. R.O.C.

E-mail: [annalin@mail.ntou.edu.tw](mailto:annalin@mail.ntou.edu.tw)

### Abstract

The purpose of this reflective study is to understand how English learners' cultural identities facilitate their confidence to use English within a native English-speaking context. This article covers a qualitative case study using an autobiographical reflection of a Chinese-speaking international student's studying experiences in a Northern American English-speaking context. The data were collected through weekly interviews and the participant's diary report. The findings first display the contradictions of self and the other in her mind during the process of using English. Second, the study explores how cultural identity and the negotiations of linguistic codes of the target and mother language interact with each other. Third, the extracts of the study reveal that the participant is aware of her miscommunication in English resulting from her lack of pragmatic knowledge of English. Some instructional suggestions focusing on fostering learners' target language pragmatic knowledge and their mother cultural identity are presented.

**Keywords:** International student, Cultural identity, Pragmatic knowledge, Second language learning

### 1. Introduction

When learning a second language, learners cannot completely separate themselves from their cultural context where they rely on the knowledge source constructed from their home society to interpret the meaning of linguistic information of the target language (Hinkel, 1999; Peirce, 1995; Tseng, 2002). The single word, inclusive of linguistic symbols, may mean nothing itself. From the pragmatic point of view, the meanings of words can derive from the context, different surroundings can result in various implications of the words (Huang, 2007; Grundy, 2000; Levinson, 1983; Mey, 2001). "Situated meanings of many words and simple phrase are combinations of their lexical meanings proper and some superimposed conversational implicatures" (Blutner, 2006, p. 512). In recent years, a pragmatic component has been applied in second language (L2) education to reinforce the learner's communicative competence (Hinkel, 1999; Kasper, 1997; Rose & Kasper, 2001). Moreover, there is a great deal of research focusing on interlanguage pragmatics to examine L2 learners' language use and acquisition of pragmatic ability (see Rose and Kasper 2001: 3-8 for a thorough discussion of interlanguage pragmatics research). By L2 pragmatic ability, Kasper and Rose (2002) meant, "how L2 learners develop the ability to understand and perform action in a target language" (p.5). Rose and Kasper (2001) indicated it is necessary and of a great potential to conduct an instructional intervention to foster learners' acquisition of the competence to use the target language properly. However, in an L2 context, relatively little pragmatic-based instruction research has explicitly explored the difficulties confronted by learners who lack such competence and how they negotiate for the proper linkage between their mother language and the target language (TL). This study intends to address this lack and echo the need to add pragmatics to the TL instruction.

In addition, until now there has been no explicit discussion of learners' identity in earlier pragmatic-based instruction research. L2 learning and using is closely related to the issue of identity (Chao, Nagano, Luna, & Geist, 2000). Most societal ideology researchers agree that identity is a social construct by means of symbolic performances depending on individual choice of practices in dynamic societal and situational contexts (Campbell, 2000; Schecter & Bayley, 1997; Star, 1991). Take English learning in a non English-speaking context as an example. For an effective oral communication in an English-speaking context, English learners ought to construct the identity toward their home culture (Lee, 2002; Milville et al., 2000) to reduce language learning conflicts. This is because the conflicts may result from the incompatibility in identities between home and target cultures (Berry, Kin, Minde & Mon, 1987; de Domanico, Crawford & DeWolfe, 1994). For learners, home culture symbolizes personal allegiance to their cultural heritage and

has been chronically embedded in their minds. In the process of L2 learning, it cannot be denied that learners addictively rely on their mother language which acts like a vehicle for affirmation of group identity toward their culture. Aspects of mother cultural identity play some role in second language learning and use (Peirce, 1995; Hinkel, 1999; Jiménez, 2000). Mother cultural identity can be emblematic of support for L2 learners confidently conducting negotiation between mother language and TL. However, considerably few studies were undertaken to understand how learners' mother cultural identity facilitated their pragmatic awareness.

## 2. Literature Review

The reviewed literature in this study focused on identity development to explore how literacy and identity interact, the significance of learners' home cultural identity, and the philosophic aspects of self and the other.

### 2.1 Formation of Identity

Identity formation is a complicated process and is gradually developed in a social context. Myers and Speight (1991) conceptualize optimal identity development as a process of coming to know self as expression of spirit. The process of identity construction can be complex and multifaceted (Schecter & Bayley, 1997). In the case of L2 learning, the identity process can be complicated by the facts that learners are under the influence of two cultural systems whose values can be extremely different from each other. Moreover, the construction of identity cannot be separated from identity negotiation in which an individual seeks for the answer to the question, "who am I?" and for his/her relationship to the world (Norton, 1997). From the psychological perspective, cultural identity can be seen as an individual's self-concept deriving from his/her awareness of membership in a particular social group (Milville, Koonce, Darlington, & Whitlock, 2000). Campbell (2000) assumed cultural identity as a social construct and that the ability to move across cultural boundaries was an advantage rather than a disadvantage. With regard to ethnic identity theory, Parham (2001) examined the evolution of identity congruence in the context of social oppression primarily based on five nigrescence stages of Black identity. By examining the role of cultural identity and heritage language maintenance among 40 Korean-American university students in the United States, Lee (2002) explained that culture identity could be formed by "the complex configuration of one's awareness of one's own culture and a recognition of the social group to which one belongs in practice" (p. 118). In general, when individuals develop their identity, most of them move from a position of devaluing their oppressed identity to embracing a positive cultural self that integrates the new identity into a universal view.

### 2.2 L2 Learners' Identities toward Their Culture

L2 learning is not just a matter of code switching between two languages. Peirce (1995) argues that language is not a neutral medium of communication, language is not a neutral medium of communication, but is "understood with reference to its social meaning" (p. 13). Owing to different patterns of social structures and social ordering, in daily communicative events, L2 learners' concepts cannot be equally interpreted through a second language. Mitchell and Myles (1998) regard the language learning process as "essentially social" and also view the learner as essentially "a social being, whose identity is continually reconstructed through the processes of engagement with the L2" (p. xi). Learning English as a second (ESL) or foreign language (EFL) therefore is not simply a matter of code switching. Many aspects of learning a second or foreign language may be affected by the interpretive principles and paradigms in learners' natal culture (Hinkel, 1999). An individual's home cultural ideology derives from the society in which he or she lives and the reality he or she constructs. Using 85 Latin students in the United States as participants, Jiménez (2000) indicated that learners' bilingual language and literacy knowledge and their understanding of identity had noticeable influence on each other. The development of students' identity of their home and host cultures may foster interpersonal relationship (Jiménez, 2000). It may be concluded then that with self-identity received from learners' home culture, learners can confidently grasp pragmatic implications of the target language and probably make further progress in communicating through the target language.

### 2.3 Dichotomies of Self-identity - Self and the Other

The conception of self-identity is based on self-concept theory, which has always had a strong influence on the emerging profession of learning counseling. This theory focuses on describing the ways people organize and interpret their inner world of personal existence and emphasizes that self-consistency is a primary motive force in human behavior. The perspective held in this study is that during the process of searching for self-consistency, an individual may confront dichotomies of self-identity, that is, self and the other. The dichotomies have been widely discussed in the field of philosophy. For some sages, the definitions of self and the other are in a relative modality. For example, the German thinker, Hegel introduces the idea of the other as constituent in self-consciousness (William, 2007). For Lévinas (1985), "the other precisely reveals himself in his alterity not in a shock negating the I, but as primordial phenomenon of gentleness" (p. 150). Lévinas (1985) assumed that the other precedes self; the other was not predicted and could not be formed into an object of the self. The term, the other, has been studied in social sciences to understand the process by which societies and groups excluded others who do not fit into their societies. The conception of

otherness later integrated to understanding of identities.

L2 learners continuously encounter new linguistic information such as words, phrases and sentences when they are in a TL situation. They repeatedly decode and encode these new messages. To some degree, mother language and TL cannot be transferred in a word-by-word modality. L2 learning is more than a code-switching task; it involves gradual integration of learners' identity of their own culture and target language culture. In the sociocultural field, Star (1991) stated that identity was regarded as an ongoing conceptualization, especially when learning a second language, the learner's self or the other ideology is continuously reorganized and retransformed. An individual's sense of self and assumptions about the other "ultimately depend[s] upon one's embeddedness within a particular sociocultural milieu" (Rosaldo, 1984, p. 140).

At present, this study themed at a nonnative English speaker's utilizing English in a native English-speaking context. The situation was that the nonnative English-speaking learner viewed the pronoun *I* as true self when she used her mother language in her own mother cultural context whereas she regarded herself as an alien, the other, when she used a TL to identify herself in a foreign cultural context. In the past, considerably few studies focused on exploring L2 learners' dichotomized mental processes and how language learners rely on the self-and-the-other concept to explore the development of learners' pragmatic ability. The study first penetrated to the heart of identity problems language learners confronted in an English conversational context in the condition of a nonnative English speaker vs. a native English-speaking country. Second, the study explored how cultural identity and the negotiations of linguistic codes of the target and mother language interacted with each other; third, the study figured out how the participant's pragmatic awareness had been evoked. Finally, instructional suggestions based on the results were presented.

### 3. Methodology

The procedure of collecting data in this study adopted a qualitative phenomenology research model. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992), phenomenology is "an attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions of ordinary people in particular situations" (p. 34). Marshall and Rossman (1995) described phenomenology as the study of experiences and the ways in which the researchers weaved them together to develop a worldwide view. This autobiographical case study drew on the participant's personal experiences as an English as a foreign language (EFL) learner in her hometown, and as an international student in an English-speaking country. The experiences displayed a very profound and reflective consideration of her transition between the two linguistic systems, and what that entailed.

#### 3.1 The Participant

The researcher invited a female international student from Taiwan as the participant. She finished her elementary, secondary and post-secondary schooling in Taiwan, where English was taught as a subject. She had no experience of staying in English speaking countries before she arrived in Canada. Her mother language was Chinese. When the study was conducted, she was at the age of 26 and had taken a Master program in a Canadian university for five months. The participant was identified by a pseudonym, Tracy.

#### 3.2 Data Collection Procedure

In this study, the data were obtained through the participant's journal, face-to-face interviews and interview observations. Interviews were undertaken for a period of three months. There were fourteen interview meetings. The participant was requested to write a diary including her school activities and daily life in her community. The researcher and the participant met once a week for a two-hour talk. The interview was semi-structured with the researcher's inquiry about what she had written in her diary. For example, the researcher asked the participant about how she interpreted herself in English and Chinese, and her experience in using English to communicate with local native English speakers in the school setting and the community in Canada and her spontaneous reflections. To collect sufficient data and to allow for a cross-linguistic comparison, the researcher allowed the interviewee to use Chinese and English to make a sober reflection on her experience of learning English in Taiwan and using English in Canada. The journal and interview data in Chinese were translated.

### 4. Interpretation

The interpretation contained the findings and the discussion. The interpretation was divided in three facets: the participant's difficulties in expressing herself, the participant's lack of pragmatic knowledge, the participant's awareness of her natal cultural identity. The researcher considered that significance of the participant's reflections could be fully developed in a discourse rather in an isolated single sentence, so the excerpted data were presented in a paragraph.

#### 4.1 The Participant's Difficulty in Expressing Herself

In the first interview, the researcher intended to get to know the process of the participant's identity construction after she arrived in Canada, so the researcher asked Tracy about how she called herself in English. From Tracy's response, the researcher explored her situation with an enlarged understanding of the complexities of an international student's

efforts to adjust to the local post secondary educational system in Canada. The confusion of her identity emerged as she began her Master's program in Canada and expanded with time. In the illustration, the participant feels confused about which social groups she belongs to:

After five months of taking the course here, I started to feel that living in between two countries is a struggle. Studying in an English-speaking country is not yet easy. I recently asked myself, 'Who am I?' I had a stronger conflict than I had expected. I was culturally isolated and felt overwhelmingly like an incomplete person. Worse than that, I belong to neither of the two cultural dimensions – Eastern or Western, or Chinese or English.

The following illustration show that in keeping her diary, Tracy felt confused about choosing the language she would use to write her reflections and worked hard come to terms with the shock of recognition of her own dichotomies - self and the other. She felt her "self" alive when her mental images could be transformed by her mother tongue either in written or spoken patterns. For Tracy, English is her public language with which she communicates for some official purpose; Mandarin instead is her private language by means of which can express her thoughts directly.

After arriving in Canada, I wanted to keep a diary. Making a decision is a supreme effort that reflects my dilemma: in what language do I write, Mandarin or English? For me, it is only by writing in Mandarin that I can set down my most spontaneous experiences and unpremeditated thoughts. Writing in English is like doing schoolwork, or performing in front of an audience. During the process of writing in English, I have to deliberately come up with the visible symbols. These words float in an uncertain space. They come up from a part of my brain where labels may be purposely manufactured but have no connection to my instincts, quick reactions, and knowledge.

In the interview that the participant said that to search for the sense of safety and reliability, she chose her mother language as a communicative tool to write down her true thoughts and emotions rather than an impersonal report written in a TL. This extract provided evidence for part of what Norton (1997) asserted definition of identity that "identity relates to desire for security and safety" (p.410). Through the use of mother language, the participant constructed her identity. The participant's condition is like the case in Schecter and Bayley's (1997) study of a Spanish family immigrating to the U.S.A. assumes that the maintenance and the speaking of Spanish demonstrates an important aspect of their sense of cultural identity.

The participant expressed that the expression of 'I' in English was not her true 'self' but a strange 'the other'. Even in the interview while she tried to elucidate the sources of such fragmentation, she also worked to acknowledge the varied ways in which the awareness of fragmentation contributed to modes of action that she might use to confront and to resist the separation of the self. The participant demonstrates dynamic and relative relationships between self and the other:

During the process of exposing myself in this English-speaking world, the English words, 'I', 'mine', and 'me' become oddly objective and impersonal. It exists in an abstract sphere and it is like a detached 'I' constructed from the other's point of view. For a while, the impersonal 'other', that is, the 'other' constructed with the North American culture, becomes part of me. When writing and speaking in English, 'I' seems so strange to me that I feel increasingly confused, 'Am I in the text?' It is a kind of schizophrenic 'I', distorted by a disconnected English linguistic symbol and an alien English pronunciation.

From the above-expected data, identities can be symbolic performances generated by individual choice of practices in an unremittingly changing societal context (Faigley, 1994; McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993; Schecter & Bayley, 1997). The example of Tracy's choice of the language to express herself demonstrates her identity. Tracy's "I" defining decision-making is a way of symbol performance and keeps on changing according to the fluid situation. As Chao, et al. (2000) state, "somewhere in the midst of two worlds, two cultures, individuals voice the challenge, dilemmas, and celebrations of their ever changing identities" (p.189). From Tracy's remarks in the end of the illustration, it can be noted that identity can be a site of continuous struggle, arising from a multiplicity of situations and group memberships, and leading to the experience of multiple recognitions (Star, 1991). When L2 learners convey their views in the target language, they are not only exchanging linguistic information with target language partners but they are constantly constructing and reconstructing a "sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world" (Peirce, 1995, p. 18). Thus, L2 learners' views of the other and the world may constantly be changed while learning a new language or living in a new cultural community.

#### 4.2 The Participant's Lack of Pragmatic Knowledge of English

In the interview, Tracy described a typical reading lesson she was taught in Taiwan. The course consisted of the teacher, with limited mutual discussion with students, requesting the students to read aloud an article in a textbook. Once in a while, the teacher might read the text aloud, or the students might be asked to repeat after each sentence recorded on the tape. In most cases, the meanings of unknown words were translated into Mandarin and the sentences containing the target words were then provided. There were sufficient exercises to practice the grammatical rules. She pointed out that

when she learned English, she seldom thought of any cultural issue related to English-speaking countries or her hometown. What she learned was just linguistic aspects of English, such as pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. However, everything turned to be quite different right after she came to Canada. She confronted the difficulties to have a conversation in English and to express her opinions in the class. With her own experience, she started to question the pedagogical aspects of English instruction in Taiwan such as the syllabus, the materials, and the methodology.

The interview data show that Tracy did feel astonished at her awkward situation in the host country. From her journal reflections, she described that in her hometown, after six years of learning English in public schools, she was to some degree trained well with the grammatical and vocabulary knowledge, but she was not able to incorporate such kind of knowledge properly. She thought she could not use English in her life and said she often misunderstood what people intended to convey in an oral context:

After I moved in the student family units, my neighbors always friendly greeted me with ‘How are you doing?’ At that time, I quite intuitively responded with the statement, ‘I am walking.’ In another predicament, I answered my friend’s greeting, ‘Hi, there.’ with a question ‘Where?’ In my memory, the structured greeting dialogue in my textbook which I learned in school was ‘A: How are you?’ and ‘B: Fine, thank you.’

From this extract of Tracy’s misunderstanding, pragmatic knowledge of English is important. In the interview, Tracy said she confused the meaning of “How are you doing?” with other expressions, “What are you doing?” “How do you do?” and “How are you?” Tracy explained that she never used these questions in an authentic conversational context and as a result she could not respond to the questions properly. She described that she learned English but had quite limited knowledge of using proper English in a right situation. In addition, Tracy’s response to another greeting, “Hi, there,” is the same problem confronted by the learner. The definitions of the word *there* can be various. It depends on the discourse context it embeds (Huang, 2007; Grundy, 2000; Levinson, 1983; Mey, 2001). From the pragmatic point of view, the participant can be short of knowledge related to this field. By pragmatics, Levinson (1983) means the study of language use and “the study of relations between language and context that are basic to an account of language understanding” (p. 21). This definition implies that understanding an utterance involves more than understanding words and grammatical structures; understanding also involves making inferences connecting what is said to what is mutually assumed or known, or to what has been said previously. What is meant by a particular sentence is not necessarily what a speaker literally means by that sentence in a particular context (Huang, 2007). There exists the gap between sentence meaning (what a sentence means in isolation) and speaker meaning (what a speaker means by a sentence).

In a daily conversation, Tracy expressed that she felt clumsy in expressing day-to-day notions that have always been taken for granted by native speakers, or just poorly performed English basic communicative functions. In addition, she said she was not good at productive skills and receptive strategies; was unable to negotiate meaning successfully; was not successful in relating English to context; and, in general, lacked communication competence. She even thought she did not receive suitable instruction of effective communication in English. Tracy’s illustration of her miscommunication is resonant with Kasper and Rose’s belief (2002) that to really learn the pragmatics of a new language, the learner has to “consciously attend to the complex interaction between language use and social context” (p. ix).

#### 4.3 The Participant’s Awareness of Her Own Culture

From Tracy’s excerpt, it can be noted that acknowledging and confronting the separateness in herself is a frightening process, and the feeling had not become less frightening with time. In her Chinese diary, she stated her failure in English conversation and the translation was:

Owing to my lack of proficiency in conversing with native speakers in an immediate situation, I cannot recognize the greeting function of the sentences. I am so limited in my experience that I cannot communicate appropriately. I even keep silent in class and just talked with my friends who speak Mandarin.

In Tracy’s condition of learning English as a second language, her feeling of separation arose. Such feeling could result from the second language itself; “there is a type of ‘originary’ alienation that institutes every language as a language of the other: the impossible property of a language” (Derrida, 1998, p. 63). That is, every language is unique in its linguistic symbol and sequential organization; in particular social and environment due to the impossible property of a language, communication can become difficulty or even break down. Under such condition, miscommunication may cause separation, and accordingly separation may alienate Tracy from the host country. Furthermore, this alienation may cause her isolation and fragmentation when turning between two different linguistic worlds. The incompatibility in behaviour, attitudes, and values between ethnic and the mainstream cultures may cause psychological stress (Berry et al., 1987; de Domanico et al., 1994). With the origin of natal culture, Tracy could not assimilate herself with the host culture and consequently suffered the sense of separation and alienation.

After one month of interview, the researcher found that Tracy continually made the effort to negotiate a sense of self

across different sites. In the journal illustration, Tracy expressed that she was increasingly aware that living in the English context seemed to be a kind of uprooted transplanting which threatened the existence of her self-identity.

‘I am [Tracy]. I am from Taiwan.’ This is a short English self-introduction I give in the first class in each course. Initially, I have no feeling with such linkage of ‘I’ and myself. I feel lost.

At the last two meetings, Tracy’s new identity appeared and this showed that Tracy came to the final stage like what Parham (2001) stated. Parham (2001) identified the stages as a procedure of how the black move from a position of devaluing their oppressed identity to embracing a positive perception of self. In this study, Tracy’s new identity integrated her host culture identity into a universal view – the combination of self and the other as a physical person.

However, at present my culture identity is one of the most significant indicators of who I am and what I believe in. Now the identity I share with my friends from my hometown allows me to discover my cultural roots. I understand that I do not own ‘nothing.’ I still have something in my mind – my past experiences and background knowledge about the world built in Mandarin in the past thirty years. In Canada, I shared my cultural roots with other Taiwanese students. When I was with them, the identity I shared with them made me feel more confident.

At the last meeting, the researcher asked the participant, “How about your life in Canada now?” The participant expressed:

I like to share everything in my hometown with my friends, those who speak English. I used English to tell them the activities and the food in some holidays. Then, I listened to their holidays and tried to understand what they are.

The finding of the illustration shows that the participant built up her confidence on the foundation of her natal cultural background knowledge. It is possible that when using a target language, learners need to have something to rely on, but are not radically oppressed to fit into a host culture (Peirce, 1995). As the interview reflection demonstrated, Tracy’s natal cultural identity rebuilt Tracy’s confident attitude toward her English ability. The finding suggests that it is Tracy’s identity toward her own culture that she can confidently take action with to adapt herself to the new environment. The illustration demonstrates that the participant confirmed the importance of her natal cultural identity:

The natal cultural identity bonds me together with people in my hometown and strengthens my mind to face my problem of using English to talk. I can talk in English better though it is not so good.

Consistent with what Milville et al. (2000) and Lee (2002) have mentioned, the participant derived from her awareness of membership in a particular social group to which she belonged and thus evoked her mother culture identity. Identifying her culture can be an advantage that the participant can cross the cultural boundaries (Campbell, 2000). Furthermore, Tracy found that her cultural identity was one of the most significant indicators of who she really is and what she actually believes in. At the same time, this identity strengthened her to face the struggle and the dichotomy between self and the other in her mind. She therefore noticed that L2 learners could hardly be learned or instructed well without drawing on the culture of the community in which it was used.

The findings of the study suggest that learners’ culture identity plays an essential role in L2 learning, especially in developing oral communicative skills. “Culture and language are inseparable” (Hinkel, 1999, p. 6). Understanding the culture of the text can be essential to successful second language learning (Tseng, 2002). Byram (1991) specified that the analysis of structural, sociological and cultural aspects of language enhanced the language awareness component of learning and contributes directly to learners’ awareness of language and proficiency as a whole. When learning a new language, learners can consult from their knowledge base constructed in first language. “The language awareness component would draw conscious attention to the similarities with and differences from the learner’s first language” (Byram, 1991, p. 23). Thus, second or foreign language teaching cannot be separated from the awareness of differences between the home and target culture. Making L2 learners aware of their own culture may enhance second language learning.

In summary, the interview data display the stages of the participant’s involvement in searching for cultural identity consistency (see Figure 1). Through the autobiographical examination, the contradictions within the participant herself that are the result of a dichotomy between self and the other are revealed. In this study, it supposes that an FL learner’s expression of “I” in Chinese can be viewed as her true self; her expression of “I” in English is not the learner’s true self but “the other” with a strange sense. With the exploration of the participant’s experience in a new context, she then detects her changing perspectives about herself in the public and private worlds as a foreigner in Canada. Her feelings of separation and alienation from herself, as a result of needing to function in English in Canada, also gain an insight into L2 learners’ problems in using English. Finally, her awareness of cultural identity strengthens her mind to take action in adapting herself to the new environment. The participant’s newly activated awareness of cultural identity can be viewed as a support to assist her to overcome her difficulties that she confronted when she studied abroad. Such awareness of

cultural identity also offers an explanation of how to improve the participant's attitude toward using English, especially when he/she faces difficulties in communication.

[Figure 1 near here.]

## 5. Instructional Suggestions

In general, the results of the study show that whenever L2 learners use the target language, they are continuously construct and reconstruct a sense of who they are and how they are connected with the social community. The results also demonstrate that the sense of safety and security originated from learners' home cultural identity ensures learners confidence in using the target language. We as language professionals should pay attention to this process and facilitate learners' pragmatic knowledge of the target language and their home cultural identity.

### 5.1 Educating L2 Learners with Pragmatic Knowledge of Target Language

Dated back to 1970s, Widdowson (1978) made a precautionary statement that EFL learners easily fall into a predicament if they have learned a large number of sentence patterns and a large number of words without knowing how they are put for an effective communicative use. In this study, Tracy's remarks show that EFL teaching materials primarily focuses on practicing linguistic or grammatical matters, such as isolated vocabulary, phrases, sentences, and structured dialogues. For the past twenty years some EFL instructors have attached a growing importance to communicative functions of language learning. However, the teaching of those functions is still underdeveloped in relation to the linguistic content in English education in Taiwan. To ensure effective communication, the learner should be instructed with pragmatic knowledge of the target language. Huth (2006) synthesized earlier cross-cultural pragmatics research and mentioned that L2 learners tend to transfer their native pragmatic knowledge when they use the target language. Some educational scholars and researchers recommended language professionals teach L2 pragmatics in language classroom (Kasper, 1997; Rose & Kasper, 2001; Taleghani-Nikazm, 2002; Wong, 2002). In addition to the forms and meanings of the target language itself, what the learner needs to learn is a connection between language and context; that is, how the target language is used properly in different contexts. The book edited by Hinkel (1999) proposed a set of instructional activities to help language professionals to foster L2 students' English pragmatic competence.

### 5.2 Capitalizing on L2 Learners' Home Cultural Identity

L2 curriculum should pay attention to cultivate learners' mother cultural identities. Learners' cultural competence should be developed in the EFL curriculum since the extracts in this study demonstrated learners' natal culture is essential to successful language learning. The traditional mandate of most ESL/EFL teachers is to teach English by acquainting their students with aspects of TL culture. However, learning about TL culture is not sufficient. Learners' identity toward their home culture should also be activated. From this study, the participant's autographical description and the viewpoints indicated in earlier research support that developing an awareness and appreciation of learners' home culture may improve their chances of achieving a reasonable measure of success in learning English (Pierce, 1995; Hinkel, 1999; Jiménez, 2000).

Thus, "[c]lassroom environment [should] allow and encourage students to recognize their own culture" (Tseng, 2002, p. 15). The suggestion is that in addition to the material topic related to TL culture, the instructor use course material congruent with the students' mother language cultural background. By doing this, the instructor can establish a connection between students' home cultural knowledge and their English. The instructor may choose the topics linked with the students' mother cultural background, like local celebrities, locations, buildings, cuisine, festivals and holidays. Through this material, students learn about their home culture in English and also construct their cultural identity.

## 6. Conclusion

This is a case study and the limitation is that the findings cannot be generalized. The discussion cannot lead to proscriptive recommendations for general pedagogical directions. However, this autobiographic study sketched out the connection between pragmatics and cultural identity. The findings shed light on an initial understanding of the process of L2 literacy and identity construction in L2 learning. However, excerpts from the interview and the diary are not enough space to fully clarify how and through what resources identities are assembled. Preliminary analysis suggests a productive area for further study. First, further qualitative research may explore the resources for learners to assemble their cultural identities. Second, quantitative research needs to be conducted to examine the effects of learners' cultural identities on pragmatic-based instruction. Third, the participants' identification of Self and the other in interpreting themselves in English can be further examined in the future. Future research may investigate the impact of the degree of participants' identification of Self and the other on learners' achievement in English speaking and writing.

Through the case study, the researcher realizes that learning a second or foreign language involves much more than being able to understand the sounds, grammar, and vocabulary of the target language; it also involves the ability to

comprehend and use the language in real communication. The curriculum for L2 learning can benefit from the inclusion of fostering learners' pragmatic component to use English properly in listening, speaking, reading and writing.

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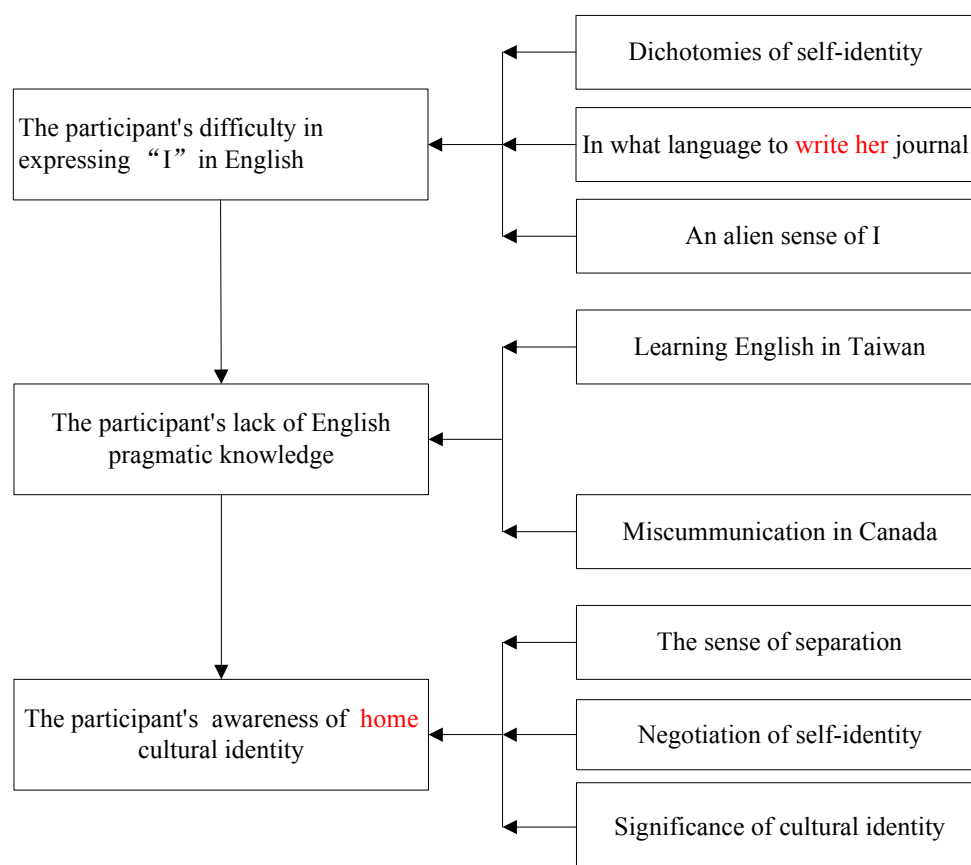


Figure 1. The stages of the participant's searching for cultural identity