THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE


DEPARTMENTS OF ASIAN STUDIES AND APPLIED LINGUISTICS


"LET THE WORLD TO HEAR OUR VOICE": INVESTMENT IN SPOKEN ENGLISH
FOR ENGLISH MAJORS IN CHINA


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SPRING 2018


A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for a baccalaureate degree
in Chinese
with interdisciplinary honors
in Chinese and Applied Linguistics


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# ABSTRACT

This study explores the investment of Chinese English majors in developing their spoken English, both within and outside the Chinese university classroom. Although much effort has recently been dedicated to developing teaching methods to increase students' oral English production in the EFL classroom, the research has frequently neglected the voices of individual students. The present study addresses this issue by investigating individual EFL students' broad investments in developing their spoken English across contexts, and then by situating their investment in the classroom within the broad context of their general investments. Data was collected through classroom observations, individual and group interviews, and reflective journals. The data have been analyzed according to Darvin and Norton's (2015) investment model which includes ideology, capital, and investment, as well as the intersections among these three components. Findings indicate that EFL students' investments in spoken English are complex, contradictory, and divergent within the same classroom context, and that ideologies play a prominent role in shaping investment both within and outside the classroom.

*Keywords:* investment, ideology, EFL

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# 1. Introduction

During the spring semester of Nicole's first year as an English major at a Chinese university, one of her foreign teachers taught a class called "Speech Writing and Public Presentation." Outside the class, the same teacher also hosted cultural events and activities, which gave students additional opportunities to practice speaking English. In regard to these two experiences, Nicole said, "Paul always organize some activities on our free time, like play some games or… have a camp, and I think 通过这些方式 [through these methods] I learn English very fast, but in his class I just sit there." Nicole enjoys opportunities to learn English during activities related to her daily life, but she still insists that she does not "want to talk more in class," and she would not suggest changing the class in order to utilize methods from her more enjoyable English learning experiences.

In contrast, Nicole's classmate Andrea found the same class very helpful for developing her spoken English skills, saying, "it's called the speech class, but it could taught me something about how to learn conversations… I think I know how to ask right questions to, like, express myself in the right way." What was the difference that produced such divergent opinions about the same class from Andrea and Nicole? Why was the class relevant to Andrea's life, but not to Nicole's? If Nicole did not think the class was helping her learn English, why did she not want it to change?

The value of oral English skills has continued to grow for many students studying in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context over the past few decades, due to a variety of factors including globalization, the rise of technology, and an increasingly competitive job market. As the value of spoken English increases, and research into effective teaching

methodologies continues to solidify the idea that increased student engagement leads to better learning outcomes, more and more attention has been paid to various teaching methodologies that have the potential to increase EFL students' spoken English production in the classroom setting (Lin, 2013; Liu, 2010; Rabab'ah, 2016).

While research on teaching methods in the EFL context has produced promising results regarding students' increased classroom engagement and improved English speaking skills, a closer look at these studies reveals that data is primarily reported for entire groups or classes of students. (Biria, Pozyeh, & Rajabi, 2017; Wu, Hsieh, & Yang, 2017). Therefore, although many different teaching practices have been demonstrated to have a positive impact on EFL classroom engagement and spoken English performance on average, the individual voices of EFL students are not being recognized in the scholarly discussion about these teaching practices.

In order to address the lack of student voices in the literature regarding spoken English in the EFL classroom, the present study explores factors constraining and enabling individual EFL students' broad investment in developing their spoken English, and how the same factors constrain and enable their specific investment in speaking within an English speech classroom. The study takes as a framework for analysis Darvin and Norton's (2015) investment construct, a more nuanced version of Norton's (1995) initial theories regarding identity and investment in language learning across contexts, which she originally proposed to address superficial distinctions between learners and their contexts. The present study finds that EFL students' investments are complex and sometimes contradictory, and that various ideologies play a particularly significant role in shaping their spoken English choices both within and outside the classroom.

## 2. Literature Review

### Oral English in the EFL Classroom

In recent years, factors such as globalization and the rise of the internet have contributed to the adoption of English as a lingua franca, leading to the implementation and growth of EFL programs at a national level all around the world. In literature situated within the EFL context, particularly at the university level, a strong emphasis has been placed on helping students develop their oral English proficiency for a wide variety of reasons, including participation in global business, diplomacy, and the international scholarly community (Gao, Cheng, Zhao, & Zhou, 2007; Kumar & Tyagi, 2014). As a result, there has been increasing research on how to help students develop their oral English proficiency within the classroom through a wide variety of methods and approaches, including a flipped classroom (Wu et al., 2017), explicit instruction of face threatening strategies (Biria et al., 2017), communication strategy training (Rabab'ah, 2016), cooperative learning (Lin, 2013), and the communicative role play method (Liu, 2010).

Additionally, researchers have also examined a variety of broader factors relating to the EFL classroom in recent years, including problems that inhibit oral communication for English majors in the Palestinian university setting (Alyan, 2013), differing perceptions on oral participation in the Chinese university EFL classroom (Zhou, 2015), university EFL students' perceptions of teaching practices in Thailand and Serbia (Radić-Bojanić, Topalov, & Sinwongsuwat, 2015), factors impacting teachers' assessment of EFL students' speaking skills in Turkey (Ekmekci, 2016), and the relationship between group interaction strategies and oral English performance within a Chinese university EFL classroom (Xu & Kou, 2018).

Taken together, these studies have contributed to the body of knowledge about oral English proficiency development in the EFL classroom setting within the past decade. However, analyzing the methodology in these studies reveals a concerning trend: results are primarily reported aggregately for entire groups or classes of students (Biria et al., 2017; Ekmekci, 2016; Liu, 2010; Rabab'ah, 2016; Radić-Bojanić et al., Wu et al., 2017; 2015; Xu & Kou, 2018). Even in the studies that include students' direct words, they are either quoted anecdotally from a large pool of participants (Zhou, 2015), or they are quoted without context other than their gender and year of study at a university (Alyan, 2013). Additionally, some teaching recommendations are based simply on a synthesis of the literature, without direct research involving students at all (Lin, 2013).

Therefore, although increased participation or higher English proficiency was identified at the group level for each of the teaching methods examined, there is no way to see how individual students responded to the new teaching methods. When students are separated into categories such as "excellent students" and "low mark students," there is no context to show the process through which they came to represent the top and bottom of their EFL class's range of grades (Liu, 2010). When contrasts are given, such as a sophomore student in Palestine thinking her English classes are too crowded for her to learn, while a junior student thinks responsibility for English learning rests primarily on the students, there is no background from which to explore possible causes for this sharp difference in opinion (Alyan, 2013). These gaps in the understanding of individual students' responses lead to an inability to interpret variation within EFL classrooms, despite recognition in EFL teaching literature that "learners differ greatly in the strategic processes they invoke to learn or use an SFL" (second or foreign language) (Purpura, 2013, p. 533). Therefore, despite the plethora of recent research on oral English in the EFL

classroom, there is a great need to understand learners individually within the EFL classroom, and to explore their classroom participation at an individual level, situated within their own differing contexts.

## The Investment Model in the EFL Context

In 1995, Bonny Norton proposed a theory of identity and investment precisely because she saw "artificial distinctions between the language learner and the language learning context" in previous theories (Norton Peirce, 1995, p. 10), primarily Gardner and Lambert's (1972) foundational study regarding instrumental and integrative motivation in second language learning. In Norton's view, there was a need to "develop a conception of the language learner as having a complex social identity that must be understood with reference to larger, and frequently inequitable social structures which are reproduced in day-to-day social interaction" (Norton Peirce, 1995, p. 13). Therefore, Norton (2000) defines identity as "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 5). In order to address what she perceives to be "artificial distinctions" (Norton Peirce, 1995, p. 10), Norton proposed the construct of investment, which was later described as "a sociological complement to the psychological construct of motivation" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 37). Norton's concept of investment is intended to demonstrate "the socially and historically constructed relationship between language learner identity and learning commitment" (p. 37).

Initially, Norton developed her theories of identity and investment from studying the lives of immigrant women in Canada, an ESL context (Norton Peirce, 1995). While the studies

that quickly followed Norton's groundbreaking work continued to focus on the ESL context, application of identity and investment has now spread around the world, including significant work from Norton and her colleagues regarding digital literacy in Uganda (For a full review, see Darvin & Norton, 2015). However, little work has been done to apply identity and investment within the EFL context at the university level, particularly with a focus on the context of individual learners' development of oral English proficiency, or lack thereof.

One significant exception is the work of Gao Yihong, who has pioneered the study of identity and investment within the Chinese context. For instance, Gao, Li, and Li (2002) conducted case study research on English learning and self-identity change in the Chinese university setting, focusing on three English majors at one top Chinese university. One of their research questions deals with the extent of how foreign language learning impacted students' identity formation. About this question they conclude, "The extent to which EFL learning contributes to identity construction may not be less than that of ESL" (p. 115), but they did note a crucial difference, saying, "compared with ESL contexts, the immediate learning situation in the Chinese EFL classroom might be playing a more crucial role in the learners' identity formation" (p. 116).

In addition to Gao et al.'s (2002) focus on individual learners' self-identity changes, Gao et al. (2007) conducted a large-scale, longitudinal study of more than two thousand Chinese undergraduate students at thirty different universities all across China in regard to their English learning motivation types and self-identity changes. This study's methodology represents a significant departure from Norton's (Norton Peirce, 1995) initial study about identity and investment, because Gao et al. (2007) also draw on the construct of motivation following Gardner and Lambert's (1972) tradition. Gao et al. (2007) utilize a questionnaire for their data

collection, and results are presented in aggregate, so even though the study addresses self-identity change, the individual learners have once again been separated from their contexts, which was the initial concern that led Norton (Norton Peirce, 1995) to present her new theory. Gao et al. (2007) found correlation between such factors as "intrinsic interest" in learning English and "productive" or "additive" self-identity changes (p. 148), but further research is necessary to contextualize this correlation within individual students' lives.

After receiving criticism that such constructs as identity and investment were not relevant to understanding the landscape of English learning in China, Gao (2007) defended her and her colleagues' work by addressing the criticism as a fundamental difference between structuralist and constructivist orientations to research. Shortly thereafter, a special issue of the *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication* in 2008 was dedicated to exploring identity and investment for Chinese learners of English. In the introduction to this special issue, Arkoudis and Davison (2008) justify the focus on investment of Chinese learners not only because the dramatically increased focus on English in China has led to "the largest number of English language learners in the world" (p. 3), but also because the rise of English in China "is not without cost or conflict" (p. 3). China has been rapidly changing in many dimensions in the last few decades, and "In this fluid and dynamic situation, learners' identities and investments in English language education are becoming more and more complex and contested" (p. 4). In their comments on the special issue, Norton and Gao (2008) likewise note that particularly within China, "English language learning entailed complex and often contradictory relationships that challenged conventional practices and beliefs" (p. 113), and that for Chinese learners of English, "issues of identity and investment are paramount considerations" (p. 117).

Within the special issue, three studies explored investment of Chinese English language learners in China specifically at the tertiary level. Gao, Cheng, and Kelly (2008) focus their analysis outside the classroom on Chinese student's investment in a self-organized English discussion group, while Trent (2008) focuses on Chinese students' investment within a traditional EAP course at an EMI institution in Hong Kong. Gu (2008) looks at identity and investment both within and outside of the classroom, as she explores the transformation of Chinese students from non-urban areas as they position themselves within an educated Chinese urban community and an English-speaking Christian community.

Although Norton's identity construct includes the idea that language learner's identities may not be unitary "across time and space" (Norton, 2000, p.5), studies such as Trent's (2008) work within the classroom and Gao et al.'s (2008) work within a discussion group continue to limit the scope of understanding what broad factors shape language learners' investment within a particular setting. Trent (2008) compares two different classroom settings, an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) class and an Economics class, both taught at an English Medium of Instruction (EMI) university in Hong Kong. He finds that students' investment in speaking within the classroom was much greater in the EAP class, where "sufficient freedom and control to shape the processes and products of this investment" was granted to them (p. 45), but there is once again a lack of focus on individual students' experiences within the classroom, as well as a lack of context regarding their English investment outside the class.

Similarly, Gao et al. (2008) found that their participants' initial investment in their discussion group was partially driven by "a lack of opportunities for practicing English" (p. 14), even though they all attended an EMI university. In this setting, inclusion of the classroom context could shed light on the factors that shaped these students' particular investment in a

community of their own making. In contrast to these studies that focus on an individual context, Gu (2008) did conduct research across contexts in the form of three case studies, focusing on identity construction and investment transformation for university students who come from non-urban areas in China. Gu found that the sole English major who participated in her study was heavily invested in communities and imagined identities outside the classroom, which led her to withdraw from the classroom setting, as she said, "most people in our circle didn't like bookworms" (p. 59). By investigating a single student's identity across contexts, Gu was able to discover that strong investment in one English-speaking context did not necessarily translate to other contexts, because a conflict existed between the classroom and her own imagined identity, which she could pursue more effectively in a community outside her classes.

In addition to demonstrating the variation of investment across contexts, Gu's (2008) findings also present a much different picture from Gao et al.'s (2002) previous assertion that that the Chinese EFL classroom "might be playing a more crucial role in the learners' identity formation" (p. 116). The possible devaluation of the classroom in China was further developed by Gao, Wang, and Zhou (2014), who conclude their longitudinal study of investment with a doubtful outlook on the classroom:

> With increased globalization, the EFL classroom for many is gradually becoming *peripheral* and the outside is becoming *central* for learning, but students' learning "habitus" is still anchored in teacher's classroom teaching, be it motivating or demotivating. (p. 94, italics in original)

As the factors shaping students' investment in the EFL classroom continue to change, further research is needed. Additionally, in order for this further research to contribute a deeper understanding of the complexities of students' investments, and how their investments change

across contexts, the research must be situated within the broader context of individual students' lives.

## An Updated Investment Model

Two decades after Norton first published her ideas about identity and investment, they were recognized as "foundational" by those who embrace the social turn (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 36), with researchers drawing on these constructs to explore the relationship between language learners and their language learning contexts all around the world (for a full review, see Darvin & Norton, 2015). However, Darvin and Norton (2015) suggested that it is necessary to put forth an updated model of investment, one that would account for continuing changes to the nature of language learning contexts on a global scale. Norton previously asserted that language learners' identities could shift across contexts, but developments such as increasingly affordable travel and the meteoric rise of online connectivity have made it increasingly difficult to draw clear contextual distinctions. Likewise, shifts in the global economy have contributed to reframing language ideologies and linguistic capital, highlighting the shifting nature of individual language learners' positioning.

In order to account for these changes in the nature of multilingual interactions, Darvin and Norton (2015) propose including both "ideology" and "capital" alongside identity, suggesting that investment is found at the intersections of these three (See Figure 1). Unlike the previous focus on microstructures within daily interaction, this new model requires the researcher to "go beyond the microstructures of power in specific communicative events and to investigate the systematic patterns of control" (p. 42) that are indexed by those events. Ideology is foundational to this more nuanced construct of investment, because unequal power relations

can enable "the arbitrary to be misrecognized as the natural order" (p. 43), thereby influencing

how learners are positioned and how their capital is valued. Indeed, capital can be understood in

a variety of ways, including economic, cultural, and social, but rather than viewing these types of

capital as being valued in absolute ways, "symbolic capital" is key because "capital itself is fluid

and dynamic, subject to – but not completely constrained by – the dominant ideologies of

specific groups or fields" (p. 44-45). Finally, identity is seen as "a struggle of habitus and desire,

of competing ideologies and imagined identities" (p. 45), and understanding identity means

understanding both how "learners position themselves and are positioned by others in different

contexts" (p. 45). Together, ideology, capital, identity, and the intersections between them

combine to form a picture of a language learner's investment in the target language.



**Figure 1. Investment Model (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 42)**

Since the recent development of this more nuanced concept of investment, it has primarily been utilized to investigate the investment of language teachers (Stranger–Johannessen & Norton, 2017; Wolff & Costa, 2017), or the investment of international students in a second language context (Jang, 2017; Kim, 2017), but little attention has been paid to how a more nuanced and explicit focus on ideology and capital can inform research and teaching for language students in a foreign language context. An exception is Shahri (2018), who utilized Darvin and Norton's (2015) framework in an EFL context to explore two students' English voice construction. Because of his emphasis on voice construction, Shahri (2018) specifically focuses on two participants based on their excellent performance in classes, which he notes as significant because the other six students he studied "could hardly be said to have constructed a distinctive voice driven by the level of intentionality" displayed in his focal participants' voice construction (p. 104). Therefore, he focuses on the high symbolic capital of their English voices and the ways they identify themselves because of it, but Shahri's (2018) work does not speak to the constraints that kept the other students from attaining symbolic capital of similar value.

## Research Questions

In order to more deeply understand investment in the EFL classroom, further research is needed about how ideology, capital, and identity come together to shape students' investments in English, first from a broad perspective and then specifically within a classroom context. Additionally, in order to understand the factors that may constrain students' investment rather than enable it, research should not only focus on students who demonstrate extraordinary investment in the classroom, but should also give voice to students who demonstrate low

investment as well. These considerations lead to the following research questions, which will be addressed in the present study:

1. What factors constrain and enable English majors in the Chinese university setting regarding their investment in spoken English?

2. How do these factors impact students' investment in speaking in an English public speaking class?

In this study, "factors" can be understood as any experience, ideology, influence, emotion, or opportunity that students reference in regard to their experiences with learning English, and particularly in regard to their spoken English. "Investment" refers specifically to the recent model proposed by Darvin and Norton (2015), and includes the components of ideology, capital, and identity, as well as the intersections of these components, which include positioning (identity and ideology), affordances for learning (capital and identity), and systematic patterns of control (ideology and capital).

# 3. Methods

## Context

The participants for this study were all drawn from one section of a first-year speech class called "Speech Writing and Public Presentation" for English Translation and Interpretation majors at a first-tier international studies university in Northwestern China. This class is a required course for first-year students in the major, and it is one among several classes that the students take together. The course met once a week for two hours throughout all eighteen weeks of the Chinese semester, and contained a total of twenty-three students, including five male students and eighteen female students. According to the syllabus, the intended outcomes are as follows:

At the end of the semester students will be able to:

· Be aware of the processes involved in all speaking;

· Assess the importance of English pronunciation and apply it to every speaking task

· Define the rhetorical principles that shape the design and development of all speaking;

· Define self-help strategies to overcome composing difficulties and to ensure greater

 independence as a speaker;

· Improve critical reading and reasoning skills

· Improve writing and lay the groundwork for future self-improvement;

· Work collaboratively with peers

● = Student    ★ = Teacher    ▭ = Table
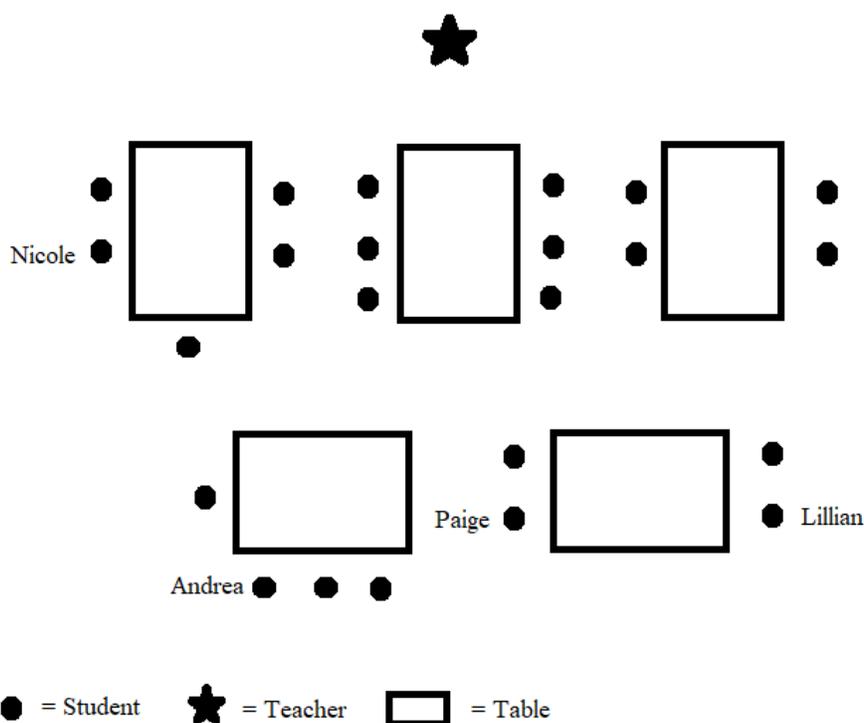
**Figure 2. Classroom Setup**

The major assignments in this course include one group presentation near the beginning of the semester about a proposed group travel itinerary, one individual speech in the middle of the semester about a personal memory, and one argumentative speech at the end of the semester. In addition to the major speeches, the teacher also designed several activities to help students develop their critical thinking skills in class, which involved students working in their table groups to defend a position or deduce an answer in the context of various games (See Figure 2). Students also participated in dramas, analyzed speeches in spoken and written form, conducted in-class peer review, and listened to presentations about elements of speaking such as organization, body language, logic, and psychology of memory.

The class was taught by Paul, an American who had been teaching at the university for four years, and who had already taught the same class four times previously. Outside of class, Paul was known among the students for being available to help them and talk with them, and he

frequently held informal cultural activities for the students, including movie nights, camping trips, and discussions about American culture. Paul is proficient in Mandarin Chinese, so even though he insisted on personally speaking English with the students both within and outside the class, he could always understand them when they chose to speak Chinese to him.

**Participants**

The four focal students (See Table 1) are all from the same section of Paul's "Speech Writing and Public Presentation" class. After hearing an explanation of the study during the second week of class, all twenty-three students were given the option of completing a brief survey which asks about their demographics and their personal history with English language learning (See Appendix A). Seventeen students completed the survey, and of these seventeen, eight students indicated that they would be willing to be interviewed further about their English learning experiences. A total of seven students, all female, actually participated in the interview process. Of these seven students, the four focal participants were selected due to their divergent experiences and analysis regarding the classroom setting. Because all the students identified themselves by their English names within the classroom setting, their pseudonyms are English as well, even though all four participants are Han Chinese students who speak Mandarin as a first language.

| Participant | Hometown | Parents' Education | Parent's Occupation | Data |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nicole | Small city | Father: Middle school<br>Mother: Middle school | Father: Businessman<br>Mother: Businesswoman | 3 interviews,<br>1 reflective journal |
| Paige | Unknown | Father: Bachelor's<br>Mother: Bachelor's | Father: Banker<br>Mother: Banker | 3 interviews,<br>2 reflective journals |
| Lillian | Rural | Father: Unknown<br>Mother: Unknown | Father: Farmer<br>Mother: Farmer | 2 interviews |
| Andrea | Large city | Father: Junior college<br>Mother: Junior college | Father: Engineer<br>Mother: Nurse | 3 interviews,<br>1 reflective journal |

Table 1. Participants

## Data Collection

Every meeting of the class was observed from the first to the last week of the semester, which included a total of eighteen two-hour class periods. After key participants were identified through their participation in an initial group interview, field notes were taken on their participation in each class throughout the remainder of the semester, and these notes were primarily utilized in order to inform questions for students' second and third interviews.

The initial group interviews focused on students' English learning history and their goals for studying English (See Appendix B). The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, which allowed for follow-up questions while also ensuring that a broad range of possible goals and experiences were addressed. To develop the initial group interview questions, the researcher drew upon Gao et al.'s (2007) seven possible motivation types, which include "intrinsic interest," "immediate achievement," "learning situation," "going abroad," "social responsibility," "individual development," and "information medium" (p. 141). These categories were refined and additional questions were included based on Darvin and Norton's (2015) investment construct.

After the initial group interview, participants were invited to complete two additional interviews, either individually or in pairs, that further explored their individual experiences and their views on the speech class. Data from the group interviews, along with data from the classroom observation, were used to refine and personalize the foundational interview question guides for the second and third interviews, which focused primarily on the students' engagement with different aspects of the speech class, and their various individual experiences with English learning (See Appendixes C & D). All four focal students participated in the initial group interviews, and all four also participated in the first follow-up interview more than half way through the semester, but Lillian was unable to participate in a final follow-up interview at the end of the semester. The questions were asked in English, and the students were asked to answer in English if possible, but Chinese was frequently used for clarification or clearer expression. When students elected to use Chinese in their interview responses, the original Chinese has been retained, along with a translation immediately following and enclosed within brackets.

In addition to the follow-up interviews, focal students were asked to complete brief journal responses to provided questions after they completed the two major individual speeches in their speech class (See Appendix E). These journal responses were intended to explore students' investment in the classroom activities that take place outside regular meetings of the class, namely class preparation and completion of assignments. Paige completed journals after both individual speeches, Andrea and Nicole each completed journals after their first individual speech, and Lillian did not complete any journals.

**Data Analysis**

All interviews were audio-recorded, and after the interviews, the audio was thoroughly

reviewed, portions were transcribed, and notes were taken for coding and analysis. Students' free

responses from the initial questionnaire and their journal responses were also included in the

coding process. Initially, the data were coded according to a key primarily informed by Darvin

and Norton's (2015) investment framework, but also adjusted to include the classroom focus,

biographical information, and themes that emerged during the data collection process (See Table

2). Data analysis was recursive, such that key factors identified at the beginning of data

collection could be incorporated into the ongoing study throughout the course of the semester.

| 1 | Key demographic info |
|---|---|
| 2 | Stated goal |
| 3 | Imagined community |
| 4 | Ideology |
| 5 | Capital |
| 6 | Identity |
| 7 | Related to classroom |
| 8 | Noteworthy but unrelated to preexisting categories |
| 9 | Language learning history |
| 10 | Object of investment |

Table 2. Coding Key

After the initial coding, student responses were grouped into "factors" that emerged as

themes from the data itself. These "factors" are defined as any type of experience, ideology,

influence, emotion, or opportunity referenced across student responses. Perhaps because the

initial interview questions were informed by Gao et al.'s (2007) seven motivation factors (See Appendix F), there was a significant relationship between students' identified factors and the seven motivational factors from Gao et al. (2007). However, because these seven motivational factors were developed from several hundred open responses from Chinese university students to the question "What drives you to learn English?" (p. 137), the relationship may be correlation rather than causation. Additionally, the themes that emerged from the data as students' identified factors were not limited to Gao et al.'s (2007) seven motivation factors, the seven motivational factors were found across the students' identified factors, and the students' identified factors impacted students' investments in different ways, demonstrating the importance of keeping analysis of language learners' investment grounded in individual learners' lives.

After separation into students' identified factors, data that included specific references to the speech class were separated from references to any other factors and temporarily set aside. Next, individual students' data regarding general factors were analyzed to identify ideology, capital, and identity across different factors, in order to check for accuracy and clarity in the coding process. After clarity was achieved for individual students' data, the four focal students' data was re-organized into factors in order to identify comparisons and contrasts among the ways that the factors constrained and enabled their investment in developing their spoken English skills.

After the four focal students' data was compared and contrasted regarding constraints and enablements for general investment in spoken English, the data specifically related to the speech class was examined and further divided into different aspects of the classroom that emerged as themes in the data collection process. These aspects include students' perceptions of course content, students' perceptions of classroom activities, students' willingness to answer questions

in class, students' preference for listening and speaking activities in class, and students'

reflections on giving speeches in class. Next, the process of checking individual students' data

for clarity and then comparing and contrasting across students was also applied to all data that

specifically related to the speech class. Finally, students' general investment data and specific

classroom data were compared in order to identify how the ideology, capital, identity, and

intersections between them that were visible in students' general investments specifically

appeared in students' investment in developing spoken English skills within the speech class.

# 4. Findings

**Factors Constraining and Enabling English Majors' Investment in Speaking English**

As the students shared their previous and current experiences with English learning through both the background questionnaire and the interviews, several factors emerged that were significant in shaping their broad investments in speaking English, although the same factors often impacted students in different ways. Previous learning experiences were instrumental, including their first attempts at learning English, the ideologies present in their early English classrooms, and the way their families either constrained or enabled their learning. While these factors primarily constrained Lillian's investment in spoken English, they all served as affordances for Andrea's learning, and Paige and Nicole's experiences were a mixture of both constraint and enablement.

Other primarily ideological factors were also prominent, including the impact of English proficiency upon their confidence, the value of speaking English for communication, the ideology surrounding their decisions about when to speak English with Chinese people, and the positioning afforded them by their current status as English Translation and Interpretation Majors. Once again, these factors all primarily enabled Andrea's investment in spoken English, but for Nicole in particular, confidence shifted from being an affordance to a constraint once she entered the university. Although all the students highly valued the communicative function of English in various ways, aside from Andrea, all the other students were primarily constrained from speaking English in front of other Chinese people, and only Paige agreed that her major served to position her slightly better for opportunities to practice speaking English.

Finally, their investment in various communities was also a prominent factor shaping students' investment in spoken English. This investment includes future careers and imagined communities, as well as their current opportunities to speak English within the university community. While investment in future careers is an affordance for everyone to develop their spoken English, the degree and concreteness of investment in English-speaking imagined communities varies significantly. Likewise, while the students are currently faced with very similar situations in the university setting regarding opportunities to practice speaking English, the opportunities that serve as enablements and constraints vary considerably among them.

**Earliest English Experiences**

Lillian grew up in a rural area, so she did not have an opportunity to study English in her first school. When she moved away from her family to attend a more urban school at the age of ten, she joined a class of children who had already started learning English, and she was immediately positioned as a troublesome and incompetent student by her first English teacher. When she wrote her English notes with her math notes because she did not know the difference, her teacher recommended that she be punished by sitting in the corner of the classroom. Lillian recalls that her teacher "hated me very much," and although Lillian did not want to study English, she worked harder in order to prove herself. This initial investment in learning English continued to exert a strong influence over Lillian, as she said of her choice to major in English Translation and Interpretation, "I choose this major… I want to tell this teacher that I am a good student in English." From the very beginning of her English learning experiences, Lillian lacked the financial and social capital to meet her teacher's expectations, and as a result, she was

negatively positioned within the classroom. In response, Lillian invested heavily in meeting the expectations of her English teacher in order to transform her identity and reposition herself as a good English student.

Although Paige did not experience such negative positioning from a teacher at the beginning of her English learning, her earliest memories likewise include the struggle to meet expectations in the classroom, as she recalls her struggle to spell the word "morning": "my father just taught me a whole night, because I can't remember the order, m-o-r-n-i-n-g , and he repeated the whole night, and he can remember all of my tasks, but I can't remember." Paige's experience was markedly different from Lillian's because when she lacked the linguistic capital to meet expectations in class, her father was able to teach her, which was a key affordance for her learning.

When Nicole started learning English in her school at the age of six, she thought that the games and songs her teacher used to teach them were quite interesting, so she was invested in the fun she could have in class. However, her classroom environment quickly became test-focused, and when the English they learned did not seem to be related to their daily lives, Nicole ceased to be invested in classroom practices. This ideological approach to English learning continued into the university setting for Nicole, as she observed at the beginning of the semester in Paul's class, "I think it's really good that we, we can play games and learn more about the English." However, she later withdrew her investment from the classroom setting and became more interested in extra-curricular activities, because she feels that out of class activities are more fun and more "connected to our daily life." A lack of fun and a lack of connection to daily life was the exact same reason why she also withdrew her investment from her earlier English classroom setting.

Andrea's earliest English experiences contrasted sharply with those of her classmates, because she learned English in a private class beginning at the age of five, two years before she began learning in school. Her first memory is the teacher coming into the classroom and saying "Hi or Hello" to each of the students individually, and then teaching them to sing English songs. Rather than struggling to catch up with classmates or meet expectations in a boring classroom, Andrea first learned English in a setting where she used it for fun and for communication. This kind of positioning resulted not only from her living in a large city where such classes were accessible, but also because her parents were equipped with the financial capital to send her to class, and they highly valued the kind of linguistic capital she would gain there. As a result, Andrea had much greater access to economic, social, and linguistic capital, which all served as significant affordances for her learning.

**Focus on Testing in the Chinese Classroom**

Despite their widely divergent initial experiences with English learning, all four students unanimously agreed that their middle and high school English classrooms were dominated by preparing for tests, most important of which was the Gaokao, China's college entrance exam. One major result of this testing focus was the devaluation of speaking skills in the English classroom, because speaking would not be tested on the Gaokao. Even though the Gaokao was years removed from their middle school classrooms, Nicole said, "in the future we will have a test for English, so we start… when we were young." According to Nicole and Paige, they did not speak English in their classes, but instead used Chinese to focus on understanding English grammar.

Although Andrea also experienced the devaluation of English speaking in her classroom, she found that the English she previously learned outside of school was valuable linguistic capital, as she said that she developed a sense of English learning, and as a result, "even I didn't know a lot about grammar… I do the test perfectly, or something, so because I learned English at the, at the young age." Andrea became highly invested in her classroom practices, because her ability to perform well and receive high grades in English caused her to win the approval of her teachers and develop her self-confidence. However, she did not hegemonically submit to the ideology of her classroom in the aspect that devalued English speaking, because in high school she once again took weekly, private English lessons that focused on speaking. In this regard, Andrea was fully aware that her decision clashed with the broader ideology of English learning that surrounded her, as she said, "I don't supposed to have time to do that before Gaokao, but I still did that, because I think it's worth it." Andrea drew on her extensive English capital she received outside her classroom to position herself as a successful English student, but her investment in English learning was still more firmly rooted in speaking than in succeeding at English tests.

**Family's Influence**

Lillian's parents are both farmers with minimal education, so they did not actively contribute to her decision-making about a major, but they think a foreign language is a good choice. Because of a lack of financial capital, they were not able to provide extra English lessons for Lillian when she was young. Despite her family's support for her English study, Lillian feels very strongly about not studying English in her home or letting her family members see her

watch English movies, because she thinks they would be disappointed that they cannot understand. She uses her English ability to help her little sister study, and she helps her family with their translation needs, but she does not want to use English for other purposes in front of them. So, her family supports her English study, but the time she spends with them constrains her ability to invest in further developing her English skills. As a result, Lillian's investment in spending time with her family in her rural community conflicts with her investment in developing her English skills.

Nicole's family also supports her English study, because her parents and her brother are all businesspeople, and they believe that her English skills will be an affordance to their business ventures. However, her parents did not provide the economic capital for her to study English outside of school. At the beginning of the semester, Nicole said her father also wants her to become an interpreter, so "we have the same idea." Later in the semester, Nicole's intended career path changed, because she became discouraged about the difficulty of becoming an interpreter. When her intended career path changed, her family's support also changed, as she says, "when I find that I don't want to be an interpreter and I told my parents, they object… so I found that it's more stressful for me." Although Nicole's family initially supported her English study, their disagreement about her changing investment in English now causes a clash of ideology within her family, leading to increased stress for Nicole on top of her discouragement regarding her English learning.

When Paige was a child, her family provided the financial capital for her to attend an oral English training camp in the summer, but they did not send her to regular English classes. Paige's family supports her English learning, but they are also a little bit concerned about it, because they feel that students who study abroad will develop both higher English proficiency

and skill in another field, making it difficult for Paige to compete with them in the job market. For Paige, this does not deter her investment in studying English, but rather serves as a challenge for her, as she says, "maybe in four years later, I will become as good as them or maybe better than them." Similar to Lillian's experience with her first English teacher, but to a lesser extent, Paige uses her family's concern and slightly negative positioning to strengthen her investment in developing her English proficiency.

Andrea's family actively encouraged her English study before she wanted to learn English herself. When her mom first enrolled Andrea in English classes, she resisted spending time on studying English, but once she experienced success in her English class in school, and received the approval of her English teachers, Andrea chose to willingly invest her time in English study. In addition to her parents' financial investment in extra English lessons, Andrea's family also keeps all her English textbooks, as though they are quite precious. Her family also actively encourages her to consume English-language media, to the extent that if she's watching the news in Chinese, her family will say, "No, turn to a channel with English version." Not only does Andrea's family ideologically support her English study, but they also possess the ability to provide financial capital for support, and they enable, or rather require, her investment in English learning within their home.

**Confidence from English Achievement**

Even though the students did not necessarily enjoy the test-focused ideology found in their early English classrooms, the ability to succeed at their tests could serve as a source of confidence. When she was young, Andrea had the best English grades in her entire grade at

school, and that knowledge significantly contributed to her confidence, as she said, "it's like I'm good at English, this level is much more than I'm good at anything else, so it's build my confident."

High grades in English were also a source of confidence for Nicole in high school, but that radically changed when she came to the university setting as an English major, because she met many "excellent classmates" who also had high English grades. A significant turning point for Nicole was a negative experience with her university's debate club, where she was unable to answer her opponent's arguments, resulting in her assessment, "I hurt my heart, lost my confidence." Even though English achievement contributed to positive identity for both Andrea and Nicole before coming to university, Nicole experienced a dramatic change in her identity as an English speaker after entering the university, resulting in a loss of confidence. Previously, the English grammar knowledge she developed in order to succeed at English tests in high school was given high symbolic value in the classroom, but after coming to the university setting, Nicole found that her abilities lost some of their symbolic value in comparison to her classmates' abilities to express themselves and their ideas in English.

**Value of Speaking for Communication**

Despite the students' current limitations regarding opportunities to speak English, they place a high value on using English for communication. According to Paige, the most useful part of English is "to communicate with each other, so speaking is a very important part of, of our study." Andrea believes that speaking is the most important language skill, as she says, "I think no matter what language we speak, we start from communication… speaking first." According

to Nicole, speaking is a vital part of *really* learning English, as she said that she did not begin to

"*really* learn English" until after the Gaokao, because *really* learning English is "I can talk with

you, and we can have a conversation… it's the using of English… I can express myself." Even

though self-expression in English was not valued in their pre-Gaokao classrooms, the students

were personally invested in learning to use English to express themselves and their own ideas.

**Impact of Speaking English with Chinese People**

Despite the value they place on speaking, and their investment in imagined identities and

imagined communities that require English speaking proficiency, the students will not

necessarily pursue every opportunity to practice, if that opportunity conflicts with their identities.

According to Lillian, if she speaks English in front of her peers, they will think that she is

showing off. Paige agrees that Chinese students do not want to speak English with her, and may

be jealous of her English-speaking ability, so instead she chooses to sometimes talk to herself.

Even though they are surrounded by students who also desire to improve their English abilities, it

is not common for them to see this as an affordance for learning.

Andrea does sometimes initiate English conversation with her roommates, who are also

in the English Translation and Interpretation Major, but she recognizes that electing to speak

English when it is not required is something that makes her different from her classmates.

Especially by the end of the semester, Andrea sought to stop thinking about others' opinions of

her English learning practices, saying she wants to "care less about what other people say, maybe

they… they don't learn English that well that like native speakers, so just stick to myself, my

thought, like this." This line of thinking contrasts sharply with one of her classmates' assertions

that Chinese students are taught to be humble, but Andrea's English learning has also been shaped by her family's insistence on her English proficiency from a young age, so these ideas are both present and competing for space in Andrea's decisions about her investment in developing her spoken English.

**Positioning as English Majors**

Although Paige thinks that Chinese students in general do not want to practice speaking English with her, she thinks this is particularly true for non-English majors, indicating that she believes being an English major does afford students slightly greater positioning in Chinese society to practice their English skills. This is especially true for Andrea within her family, as she says that if she is watching Korean TV, her family will question her because she is not studying Korean and encourage her to watch English-language TV shows instead. So, among other ways that her family pushes her to learn English, Andrea's English major is used to position her as one who ought to be watching English-language TV.

**Investment in Future Career Paths**

As majors in English Translation and Interpretation, all four students invest in developing their English proficiency with the expectation that it will serve as valuable capital for them in the job market. According to Paige, big companies require their employees to have a certificate of English proficiency, so developing the proficiency to obtain that certificate will open important doors for all of them in the job market. Lillian did not express investment in a particular career path, but she desires to get a job that will enable her to support her younger sister's study.

Initially, Nicole was quite confident and happy with her goal of becoming an interpreter, but when she decided that it was too difficult and she could not do it, she did not want to discuss alternative career plans, aside from saying that it had become a source of tension between her and her family. For Andrea, she had been dreaming of a career as an interpreter since she was young, and her investment in this chosen career path remained strong throughout the course of the semester.

**Investment in Imagined Global Communities**

In addition to their investment in English contributing to their future careers, the students also saw it as capital that would enable them to participate in a global community in the future. None of them had previously traveled outside of China, nor did they mention concrete participation in international communities within their university, but Nicole envisions that in the future she can use her English abilities to take her parents traveling around the world. At the beginning of the semester, Paige was primarily invested in developing her English proficiency so that she could access more information, demonstrating her investment in an identity as someone who is knowledgeable about the world. Additionally, Paige is also interested in traveling to an English-speaking country once she is settled in her career in China, and she believes that she and her classmates can serve as a bridge between countries, saying, "maybe in the future we can release many misunderstanding between the China, between China and many Western countries." Even though Lillian wants to stay close to her home to work, she also imagines herself as part of global discourse in the future, as she believes her skills can "let the world to hear our voice, um, here, here in China." All three of these students saw their imagined global

communities as quite distant from their current situation, as Paige said, "until now we… didn't have many opportunities to support the our family or the society using English," because their interactions with foreigners are quite limited.

Andrea's investment in an imagined global community is more concrete, as she specifically desires to go to America and assimilate with American culture. As part of this goal, Andrea is also invested in an imagined identity as a "native English speaker," someone who could be mistaken for an American. In her eyes, "If I'm, uh, in America… I would like to hear that if someone ask me if I am America… if he ask in this way, which means that my, I'm reach my goal, I'm really like native speaker." Just as Andrea's investment in an imagined community is more concretely defined than her peers, she is also more concrete in the way she is working toward her imagined identity and imagined community becoming reality. Andrea regularly watches TED Talks and tries to copy American accents, and by the end of the semester she said of her experiences copying TED Talks, "my accent grew like more like American accent… I catch the meaning, like I catch the key of the American accent, I think accent is, um, the most important thing to make you feel like you're native speaker." Even though Andrea's current access to American culture and American English speakers is limited, her investment in this imagined community has led her to find affordances for learning that are in line with her goals.

**Opportunities to Speak Outside the Classroom**

Although opportunities to speak English outside of class can take on a wide variety of forms, all the students agree that they are quite limited. Their department requires students to participate in an official English corner with their classmates a few times throughout the course

of the semester, but only Paige mentioned this as an opportunity to speak, while still concluding "we didn't have so much opportunities to speak." All the students' roommates share the same major, so Andrea regularly mixes English and Chinese when talking with her roommates, but she notes that intentions for "English Day" in their dorm building do not actually happen. Lillian and Paige both occasionally use English to speak with foreign friends, but these opportunities are also rare, because the international students at their university study in a different campus. Nicole and Paige both saw talking with their foreign teachers outside of class as an opportunity to practice their spoken English, but the overarching tone is still that they initially believed opportunities to speak outside the classroom were quite limited. Over the course of the semester, Paul created several cultural events for his students, ranging from camping trips to movie nights to sports to opportunities for discussing American culture. Paige and Nicole both became heavily invested in these activities, and Lillian participated to an extent, but Andrea was constrained from joining in the more active events due to health concerns.

Despite a lack of current opportunities to speak English, Andrea's former experiences with extra English class outside of school served as key affordances for her learning, and she values them especially because they created an "actual situation" for her to practice English. Because she grew up in a large, comparatively international city, and her parents were both highly educated and employed in relatively high-paying jobs, this learning opportunity was accessible to her in ways that were not necessarily possible for her classmates.

Paige, whose socioeconomic background is likewise comparatively high, also attended an oral English training camp when she was a child, where she experienced a unique opportunity to practice her English, but it felt to her that "it doesn't, un, last long, and when I went back to school we just study to practice our grammar." In direct contrast to their experiences, Lillian said

that she did not study English outside school because, coming from a rural family, "I don't have too much money or condition to support me to learn something outside of school." Andrea, and to a certain extent Paige, both had access to economic capital that in turn positioned them to access opportunities that served as affordances for developing their spoken English, but their classmates did not necessarily have the same opportunities.

## Students' Investment in Speaking in their English Public Speaking Class

Just as the factors generally impacting students' investment in spoken English constrain and enable their investments in widely varying ways, the emergence of these factors in their perception of and participation in the classroom context frequently leads to divergent, complex, and contradictory investments. Sometimes students' divergent responses within the classroom are contributed to the same factor, while the same responses may also be attributed to different factors.

In regard to course content, Nicole and Andrea's different ideologies and imagined identities led to opposite investments. The different symbolic value attributed to Nicole's linguistic capital led to divergent investments in the general course content as opposed to the classroom activities, but for Lillian, her investment in the activities was heavily constrained by her past positioning. None of the students were highly invested in voluntarily answering questions in class, but the constraint was primarily ideological for Nicole and Lillian, while it was primarily a lack of linguistic capital for Andrea and Paige. Divergent preferences regarding the ratio of listening and speaking within the class were heavily shaped by Andrea and Nicole's divergent ideologies, while constrained capital and negative positioning primarily impacted

Lillian's preferences. Across all these different facets of classroom participation, different ideology, positioning, and symbolic capital led to widely divergent investments, with ideology playing a particularly prominent role.

For the required major speeches, students' different ideological approaches shaped the different kinds of capital they sought to acquire from their speaking experiences, and particularly for Paige, her differing perceived benefits of investment for her first and second speech demonstrate an ideological shift over the course of the semester. Looking at different investments in the classroom compared to the extra-curricular activities led by the same teacher, the ideology behind Paige's general investment in spoken English contributes positively to her investment in both communities, while Nicole's ideology primarily constrains her investment in the classroom yet enables her investment in the extracurricular activities. Finally, students' differing imagined identities, as well as the varying strength of their investments in English-speaking imagined communities, contribute to widely differing perceptions of the classroom as an affordance for learning in pursuit of realizing their dreams.

**Perception of Course Content**

Although many students, including Nicole, expressed relief at having been freed from the test-focused constraints of their pre-Gaokao classrooms, the test-focused ideology hegemonically continued within the minds of some students. On the very first day of their speech class, the teacher said that this class would focus on developing a skill rather than accumulating knowledge, but half way through the semester, Nicole expressed frustration over the course content, saying, "we just think we 好像没有学到什么东西 [probably haven't learned

anything].” By the end of the semester, Nicole noted that neither of her two foreign teachers seemed to care as much about grammar mistakes as her Chinese teachers, but she changed her mind to thinking that developing her vocabulary was the most important goal for her English learning, because she received a poor grade on a large, departmental vocabulary test earlier in the semester. Even though Nicole was free from the Gaokao, she continued to experience tests in college, and the tests continued to dominate her personal approach to English learning in the classroom, despite her open dislike for the process.

In contrast to Nicole's negative perception of the course content, Andrea said in the middle of the semester that the class was satisfying her expectations, because "methods how to think, how to like, construct your essay, like, your, organize your thoughts, and logic, ethos, pathos, logos is the thing I want to learn in this class." During the times when Paul presented new information in lecture format, Andrea found that she was learning a lot that would help her develop her spoken English, particularly in terms of how to express her ideas, as she said, "it's helps with my spoken English, maybe not with pronunciation, not the words, but the thinking, the logic and the organization, yeah, help me with those things." Andrea sees this kind of learning as directly related to her investment in an imagined American community, because she believes that speaking English like a native speaker is not just about pronunciation and grammar, but also about ways of thinking. Because Paul is an American, he will teach things "foreigners will think about," which helps her obtain valuable cultural capital.

In contrast to Nicole's assessment that memorizing more vocabulary would help her participate better in the class, Andrea made a conscious decision to move away from this approach. When talking with another foreign teacher, she expressed that she needed to enlarge her vocabulary, but her teacher told her that memorizing words did not fit with her investment in

learning to speak like a native English speaker. After her teacher encouraged her to focus on learning words in a more natural way, Andrea concluded, "I think maybe in the future I can throw out the…word book, and I can read more things I like, and then learn more words…" Because of her investment in the native speaker imagined identity, she started to distance herself from traditional Chinese language learning practices that would conflict with that identity.

The divergent perceptions between Andrea and Nicole regarding the value of the content in their speech class can best be understood in terms of their different ideologies. Nicole was looking for knowledge about grammar during her first speech assignment, and when the course content did not serve as a useful affordance for learning, she concluded she had not learned anything. On the contrary, Andrea was invested in learning about thinking patterns and logical construction for a "native English speaker," so the course content was an excellent affordance for her learning. Although Nicole was not invested in learning the material presented in class, she concluded that her own lack of English capital was the problem, leading her to think that she ought to change herself through vocabulary memorization, rather than change the course content. This decision sharply contrasted with Andrea, who resisted vocabulary memorization because it clashed with her imagined identity as a native speaker.

**Perception of Classroom Activities**

Lillian sometimes feels nervous during classroom activities, specifically the ones that focus on reasoning, because "sometimes we should talk about our ideas with others, if you don't have specific ideas, nervous." All the way back when she was in primary school, Lillian had been positioned as a poor student because she had not previously learned English like the other

students, which made the classroom a very anxious environment for her. Now, many years later, she continues to experience anxiety in the classroom about the possibility of not knowing the right answer. On the contrary, Nicole thinks that small group discussion is relatively fun, which sharply contrasts with her lack of investment in listening to Paul's presentations. One major difference is that in the small group, Nicole can use Chinese to express her ideas, which is widely accepted by her classmates, to the extent that she thinks it would be "a little" weird to use English instead. Initially, she thought the activities were just games, but she observes that afterward "he always can tell us something about the speech," which she believes is a good way to learn.

Andrea saw some activities as helping the development of both logic and English speaking skills, as she said this kind of activity is "a chance for us to like, to find the evidence for, support for our words," but when the activities are primarily in their table groups, it only helps with their logic because they primarily speak Chinese. Paige thought that even those kinds of activities were "a better way for us to learn speech, because we use the ethos, logos, pathos."

**Willingness to Answer Questions in Class**

When Paul asked questions of the whole class without specifically selecting a student to answer, he was frequently met with a period of silence before any of the students chose to respond. Nicole did not express a desire to answer questions in class, but said that she sometimes answers because she is "a little embarrassed for him." Lillian likewise said that she may have an answer in her mind, but she and her classmates do not want to "speak it out." Their hesitance to answer questions was not only attributed to a lack of certainty about how to express ideas in

English, but also to the ideology that Chinese students are taught to be humble, and that they are hesitant to guess about an answer if they do not know for sure they are correct. For both Andrea and Paige, they were more likely to emphasize an inability to think of the answer quickly, or an inability to express their answer in English. So, while issues of ideology and limited linguistic capital both contributed to silence after Paul asked questions, Nicole and Lillian were more inclined to focus on the ideology, while Andrea and Paige were more inclined to focus on the lack of English capital.

**Preference for Listening and Speaking**

Lillian prefers listening in the class, because they have a high volume of presentations in their other classes, and they need to listen in order to learn how to actually do speeches. Similarly, Paige thinks that listening is great, because "if we have too much time to speak… then the thing we can learn from Paul is maybe more less." Although Lillian is nervous about not having enough information while Paige is excited about the possibility of learning more, both of them embrace ideologies that cause them to be invested in listening to Paul's presentations.

As for Nicole, she thinks that listening is better for her, not because she is invested in learning the content, but because she does not want to speak very much in class, which she admits is partially due to being afraid of making grammar mistakes. She believes the preference for listening is true for Chinese students in general, and that Paul has chosen this teaching method because he knows about their "style." Even though Andrea also recognized this general preference for listening over speaking among her classmates, she still would choose to have more opportunities for them to express their own thoughts in class, as she said, "some people

don't want to talk about, but I still want them to talk," because even small ideas could have a big impact on the things they are trying to figure out in class. Although Andrea values opportunities for herself to speak, she sees this as primarily a need for her classmates, most of whom have not had nearly as much opportunity to speak English as her.

**Reflections on Giving Speeches in Class**

Just as Nicole's perception of the course in general was dominated by hegemonic assent to the very ideologies she disliked in her childhood, her perception about the value of her speaking experience was constrained by the same thinking. When reflecting on how the first speech helped her pursue her goals for English learning, Nicole said, "I can learn some grammar from the information on the websites," a hegemonic reproduction of the ideology in her early classes.

For Andrea, succeeding in English class continued to be a source of confidence for her in the university setting, just as it had been since primary school. Although she was quite nervous after her first speech and did not remember many of the words she planned to use, she invested much more time in practicing her second speech, and the confidence she gained from successfully delivering it carried over into other settings as well, as she said, "It's like I can do this on Paul's class, I succeed at the first time, so I can succeed in every other time."

Paige's reflections on her two speeches capture the change in the ideology she embraced for her own English learning throughout the course of the semester. For her first speech, Paige believed it helped her with her English goals because she needed to do research when she did not know how to express her ideas, but for the second speech, she discovered "it's possible for me to

tell a story in a funny way and catch my audience attention." Initially, Paige was primarily

invested in the information she could acquire as capital through her English learning, but over

the course of semester, she placed greater value on her own ability to communicate her ideas

with others.

**Symbolic Capital, Positioning, and Class Participation**

In Nicole's experience, shifting symbolic value of her English capital resulted in radically

different positioning within the university setting compared to her previous high school

experiences. While she was positioned as a successful English learner in high school due to her

high achievement on English tests, Nicole was positioned as incapable of expressing herself in

situations where spoken English was valued over knowledge for grammar tests within the

university setting. The negative positioning she experienced after coming to the university

caused her to withdraw from English learning opportunities that did not place high value on the

form of her English linguistic capital, but she invested instead in settings where her Chinese

linguistic capital could also serve as an affordance for learning, as it had in her high school

English classroom. Within the university community, her primary investments included the small

group table discussions within her class and especially the extra-curricular cultural activities

hosted by Paul, because her linguistic capital, including her Chinese, was valued in both places,

which enabled her to position herself as a successful student and draw on her capital as an

affordance for learning.

Although Andrea's English capital was valued according to the same test-focused

ideology as Nicole within her middle and high school language classrooms, she could draw upon

the previous affordances for learning provided by her family's social position in a large city, their economic capital, and their ideology that valued meaningful English communication in order to resist this ideology. Andrea was aware that the ideologies shaping her English speaking opportunities outside class contrasted with the ideologies in her early English classrooms, but she discovered that her communicative abilities could serve as an affordance for learning grammar and taking tests. From early in her childhood, Andrea was accustomed to making connections between different opportunities to invest in English learning, and her experience in the speech class was no different, as she found ways to invest in her imagined identity as a member of American culture through her participation in classroom activities. Unlike Nicole, she thought about possible changes to the speech class, including more opportunities to speak, that would help her even more with her goals, because Andrea did not see a fundamental, ideological distinction between her investment in the classroom and her investment in her imagined identity.

The value placed on Andrea's linguistic capital early in her childhood contrasted sharply with Lillian's, because Lillian's inability to access English education at a young age immediately positioned her as a poor student in the English classroom. It was this negative positioning that initially pushed Lillian to invest in English, but she was at odds with a classroom where her lack of English capital reflected negatively on others' perceptions of her identity. In this way, Lillian's early English learning was shaped by the ideology that she needed to prove herself against a negative standard. Lillian hegemonically brought this ideology into the university English classroom with her, because even though she recognized that Paul was more relaxed than her strict teachers from the past, she still expressed nervousness about having ideas to talk about in class, which was not shared by her other classmates.

**Relationship Between Extra-Curricular Activities and Class**

Lillian, Paige, and Nicole all agreed that Paul's willingness to create cultural activities for them, and their participation in those activities, relaxed and improved the classroom atmosphere. Lillian, whose previous English classes had been dominated by strict ideologies, particularly noted that if someone was late to class, Paul would say "it's ok." According to Paige, she feels more comfortable in the class because Paul "is more likely to be a friend, not just a teacher." Although she had been more invested in learning English in order to access new information at the beginning of the semester, the extra-curricular activities increased her investment in learning American culture, which Paige said also increased her investment in developing her spoken English proficiency. By the end of the semester, Paige was focusing more on developing her oral English skills in her classes, and she started to see her role in communication as "maybe more active than before, because actually I think I have more opportunities, and more, and more confident to speak to others."

While Paige's extra-curricular experiences led to her increased investment in class, they did not have the same influence on Nicole. She did not express a strong connection between the extra-curricular activities and the class, as in class she would "just sit there," but she claimed to "learn English very fast" through the activities, which were more fun and where they could "一边玩，一边学 [have fun and study at the same time]." In that setting, Nicole was also able to speak Chinese, because Paul could understand her, even though he would respond in English. For Nicole, she has always feels more successful in settings where her Chinese linguistic capital is also valued, from her successful grades in high school to the table activities in Paul's class, and most importantly, the extra-curricular activities. Nicole additionally finds that it is easier to

remember the English she learned during activities because of its relationship to her daily life, another cause of investment found in her earliest learning experiences, but she does not think that Paul should change his classroom methods, because "his topic is about speech, so maybe it's not connected to our daily life." This ideology is the same one that caused Nicole to lose interest in her childhood classroom, but she continues to hegemonically embrace it in her assessment of what the classroom should be like, while still enjoying investment in other opportunities to speak English much more.

Even though Nicole's investment in extra-curricular activities did not result in an ideological change to her classroom learning, they did have a significant impact on Paige's investment in the classroom context. Initially, Paige's primary investment in the class was learning new ideas, because she is invested in an imagined identity as an informed participant in global discourse. Although her initial focus on primarily taking in information was also shaped by broad, cultural ideologies about the nature of the classroom in China, Paige started to realize that the knowledge she was gaining could serve as an affordance for adding her own voice to cross-cultural conversations. Because her investment in learning new information drove her participation in both classroom and extra-curricular activities, her ability to actively engage with new cultural experiences outside the classroom naturally encouraged her to seek the same opportunities within the classroom, leading her to view both contexts as affordances for developing her spoken English skills.

**Imagined Communities and Affordances for Learning**

All four students expressed investment in imagined global communities, but their positioning creates different affordances for investing in their future goals. Lillian is heavily invested in maintaining a close relationship with her family, and she does not want to live far away from them, but she also resists investing in her English learning when she is in their presence. As a result, conflicting ideologies make it difficult for her to concretely invest in an imagined international community where she can "let the world to hear our voice, um, here, here in China." For Paige, her participation in extra-curricular cultural activities serves as an affordance for learning more about her imagined global community, which aligns with her investment in learning English in order to access information. As Paige's investment in becoming a contributing member of cross-cultural discourse grew, her access to knowledge served as an affordance to her learning, and she discovered that she could draw on her classroom opportunities as affordances for developing her spoken English skills as well.

Andrea's investment in her imagined identity as a native English speaker is concretely rooted in her previous English lessons with a foreign teacher, a significant affordance for developing her spoken English proficiency. Because Andrea had experience participating in international discourse through her English learning, she is able to draw upon this previous "actual situation" in order to inform what kinds of capital she seeks. Outside of class, Andrea invests in developing her American accent through copying TED talks, while inside her speech class she focused on catching her foreign teacher's humor and understanding his way of thinking in order to inform the logical construction of her English communication. Despite being currently removed from her imagined American community, Andrea has found affordances for learning both within and outside the classroom setting that help her invest in this imagined

community and in her imagined identity within it. This kind of active investment is much

different than Nicole's expression that she would like to travel in the future, and that she can take

her parents traveling with her. Although she desires this opportunity, she has not found

affordances for learning that enable her to concretely invest in it.

# 5. Discussion

## Summary of Findings

When the investment model is applied to understanding the factors that constrain or enable students' investment in spoken English within the EFL context, and how those factors influence students' investment in the classroom context, several notable findings emerge. First, factors that were present early in students' lives continue to have a profound influence on the way they invest in the university EFL classroom, as demonstrated through Nicole's test-focused ideology, Lillian's nervousness from being positioned as a poor student without answers, and Andrea's confidence from her positive positioning as a knowledgeable and capable student.

Second, different ideologies about the classroom can cause widely differing perceptions of the course content as an affordance for learning, as well as differing levels of openness to change, as seen through Nicole and Andrea's divergent responses to the speech class content. Third, differing ideologies that drive investment in the same context can cause students to invest differently in other contexts, such as Paige and Nicole's differing ideologies for investment in the extra-curricular activities causing much different levels of investment in the EFL classroom.

Fourth, barriers to investment in the classroom context may be caused by different factors for different students, as seen through Lillian and Nicole's resistance to answering questions in class primarily stemming from ideology, compared to Paige and Andrea's resistance primarily stemming from insufficient linguistic capital to understand and respond. Finally, students' varying investments within the classroom context can cause them to perceive much different affordances for learning from the same classroom activity, demonstrated by the students' different responses to their major speech assignments.

**Implications for Pedagogy**

Due to the highly situated nature of investment research, the results of this study are not intended to be directly generalizable to other EFL students and classroom contexts. However, the key themes that emerge from the study may inform classroom practice when applied by a teacher to his or her individual context. While it is essential for teachers to position students equally within the classroom, teachers should be aware that previous positioning outside the classroom may continue to have an impact on whether or not students perceive that they are positioned positively within the classroom setting. Even fostering an equal and inclusive classroom ideology may not be enough to position students positively within the classroom, because ideologies and symbolic capital outside the classroom walls can create systematic patterns of control, thereby taking away some individual students' rights to speak.

Additionally, even when a teacher is careful to learn about students' individual backgrounds and personal investments in English, he or she should be aware that due to complex and sometimes contradictory ideologies, investments outside the classroom may not be applicable within the classroom context. If students hegemonically embrace ideologies that prevent them from investing in the classroom, or prevent them from investing in specific classroom activities, teachers may need to address this lack of investment at the ideological level. Even if multiple students appear to lack investment in the classroom, or in specific classroom practices, it cannot be assumed that their lack of investment stems from the same factors. Instead, teachers must address students' lack of investment in the classroom on an individual basis.

Finally, students' differing investments in imagined communities and imagined identities outside the classroom may cause them to both look for and find dramatically different affordances for learning within the class content and the major assignments. While teachers may

draw on these divergent investments to connect content and activities to individual students'

lives, they should be aware that students' personal investments may cause them to miss the

objectives set forth by the teacher. Although the content and activities may be presented with

explicit references to the ideologies the teacher seeks to establish for the class, if these ideologies

are in conflict with those already held by the students, then the ensuing ideological conflict may

lead to complex and contradictory patterns of investment in classroom practices, as well as to

some students' perceptions that the class content is disconnected from their personal investment

in English language learning.

## Implications for Research

After Bonny Norton (Norton Peirce, 1995) first established the relevance of identity and

investment for understanding the language learning experiences for immigrant women in an ESL

context, Gao, Li, and Li (2002) found that these constructs were just as applicable to the EFL

context. Likewise, while it has been established that a more nuanced version of investment is

necessary to understand the investments of English teachers and language students in a second

language context (Jang, 2017; Kim, 2017; Stranger–Johannessen & Norton, 2017; Wolff &

Costa, 2017), the present study finds that a more nuanced version of investment, based upon

ideology, capital, and identity, is also necessary to understand the investments of English

students in the EFL context. Additionally, this model does not only apply to understanding the

factors enabling the success of exceptional students (Shahri, 2018), but also to understanding the

complex interweaving of constraints and enablements for a wide variety of students in the same

classroom setting.

Findings from the present study particularly highlight the role of ideologies in shaping students' investment in speaking English in the EFL classroom. These ideologies are not only the ones explicitly present within the classroom, but also those held by individual students from their own former experiences, positioning, and investments in imagined identities and imagined communities. However, the present study did not extensively address the teacher's ideologies, but rather included student perceptions of ideology within the classroom. Therefore, further research is needed to explore how differing ideologies shape different perceptions of and investments in the same classroom for both teachers and students.

More broadly, further research is needed to explore how students' investment in speaking within the EFL context relates to teachers' perceptions of students' investments. Due to the widely divergent perceptions of investment within the classroom context found among students in the present study, the significant difference between students and teachers in a variety of areas also suggests the possibility for widely varying perceptions of the EFL classroom stemming from students' and teachers' differing ideologies, capital, and identities.

Finally, because investment is a highly situated construct, with significant variation among students within the same EFL classroom context, further research is needed to develop a broader picture of students' investments in EFL classrooms of different levels, in different cultural contexts, and with students of different socioeconomic backgrounds. Individual EFL students are underrepresented in the literature about English language teaching, and further research will begin to address this inequality by providing an opportunity for the world to hear their voices.

**Conclusion**

Despite the lack of individual EFL student voices in the current scholarly conversation regarding their investment in spoken English within the classroom context, the present study demonstrates that EFL students' investments in spoken English are complex, sometimes contradictory, and often widely divergent within the same classroom. Additionally, the ideological aspect of investment plays a particularly prominent role in shaping these EFL students' investment both within and outside the classroom context. Further research is needed to more deeply understand the relationship between EFL student and teacher ideologies, as well as the investment of EFL students situated in other contexts. As more research is devoted to these areas, the world will truly hear the voices of EFL students in terms of their investment in language learning.

**Appendix A Language Background Questionnaire**

Name:_____ Gender:_____ Ethnicity:_____

Age:_____ Hometown:_____ First Language:_____

Highest Degree for Father:_____ Mother:_____

Occupation of Father:_____ Mother:_____

Would you be willing to meet with other students to talk about your experiences and goals for learning English, and your experiences and goals in this speech class?  Yes / No

English Learning Background:

1. How old were you when you first started studying English in school? _____

2. In your first English classes, please rank the following four skills from 1 to 4 according to which was focused on the most in class, with 1 having the most focus and 4 having the least focus:

    _____Reading     _____Writing     _____Listening     _____Speaking

3. In your later English classes in school, did the amount of focus on each of these four skills change? If so, how?


4. Did you previously study English in extra classes outside of school? If so, for how many years, and how many times a week?

5. **If you studied English in classes outside school, please rank the following four skills from 1 to 4 according to which was focused on the most, with 1 having the most focus and 4 having the least focus:**

        \_\_\_\_\_Reading    \_\_\_\_\_Writing    \_\_\_\_\_Listening    \_\_\_\_\_Speaking

**Current English Learning:**

6. **How did you decide to become an English translation major at this university?**

7. **Outside of school and extra classes, do you have opportunities to use English? If so, how often? For what reason?**

8. **Do you regularly listen to English music or watch English TV shows? If so, how often?**

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**Have you ever traveled or lived in an English-speaking country? If yes, please answer the following questions. If no, you may leave the questions blank.**

**Country:_____ Length of Stay: _____ Age during travel:_____**

**Purpose of travel/study:**

_____

_____

**Appendix B Group Interview Question Guide**

1.   I see from the questionnaires that many of you started learning English when

you were ___ years old. Can you tell me about that experience?

2.   Are there any specific experiences that impacted your view of English or

English learning?

3.   I see that speaking was [insert description based on questionnaire] in many of

your English classes. Did that change at all during middle and high school?

4.   What kinds of opportunities have you had to use spoken English?

5.   What kinds of goals do you have for your English learning?

a.   Depending on what goals are volunteered by the students, specific

questions will be asked in order to cover the following areas: exam scores, job

opportunities, English-language media, working/studying in an English-speaking

environment, changes opinion of self, changes others' opinion, serves family/society,

personally enjoyable

6.   In light of your goals for studying English, what are your goals for your ability

to use spoken English?

**Appendix C Student Engagement Individual Interview Guide 1**

1. How is the speech class going?

2. Do you think your spoken English has been improving this semester? If so, how?

4. During our group interview, you mentioned that [insert student's stated goal] was a goal for your English pronunciation. Could you tell me more about this goal?

4. Do you think the class has been helping you with this goal? Why or why not?

5. How would you describe your participation in this class?

6. What do you think about [insert classroom activity that field notes indicate was particularly interesting, or uninteresting, for this student]?

7. Have you been using English outside the classroom this semester? If so, how?

8. How is this English use outside the classroom related to your goals?

**Appendix D Student Engagement Individual Interview Guide 2**

1.    How is the speech class going?

2.    Do you think your spoken English has been improving this semester? If so,

how?

3.    You've said that [insert previously identified goal] is a goal for your oral

 English. Do you think the class has been helping you with this goal? Why or why not?

4.    Do you think your goals have impacted your participation in class? If so, how?

5.    How would you describe your participation in this class?

6.    What do you think about [insert classroom activity that field notes indicate was

particularly interesting, or uninteresting, for this student]?

7.    Have you been using English outside the classroom this semester? If so, how?

8.    How is this English use outside the classroom related to your goals?

## **Appendix E Student Journal Questions**

1. How did you prepare for this assignment outside of class?

2. How much time did you spend preparing?

3. How do you think you performed on the assignment?

4. Do you think this assignment helped you with your goals for speaking English?

Why or why not?

**Appendix F Gao et al.'s (2007) Seven Motivation Factors (p. 141)**

## Motivation Types

The factor analysis yielded seven factors, which accounted for 54.54% of the total variation. They were

1. *Intrinsic interest:* Appreciation or fondness of the target language and certain aspects of its culture. (Questions 21, 19, 1, 20, 23, and 18 in Appendix B had relatively high loadings on this factor. They are ordered here according to the loadings, from high to low.)

2. *Immediate achievement:* Learning the target language to obtain satis-factory results in exams, e.g., for university entrance or graduation (Questions 4, 6, 3, 11, 2).

3. *Learning situation:* Learning English because of aspects of the learn-ing environment such as the quality of teaching, teaching materials, teachers, and affiliation with the learning group (Questions 8, 9, 10, 7, 5).

4. *Going abroad:* Learning English to go abroad for various purposes, such as "finding better education or job opportunities," "experienc-ing English-speaking cultures," and "immigration" (Questions 26, 28, 27).

5. *Social responsibility:* Learning the target language to combine "harmo-nizing the family" and "putting the country in order," emphasizing individuals' responsibility to fulfill social expectations. This motiva-tion type, which is based on Confucian tradition, was not found in existing literature and might be particular to Chinese or Asian con-texts (Questions 24, 25, 22).

6. *Individual development:* Learning English to increase one's own ability and social status in future development, which could be as specific as "finding a good job" and as general as acquiring "a sense of achieve-ment" (Questions 29, 30, 16, 13, 14).

7. *Information medium:* Learning English to obtain information and learn other academic subjects (Questions 15, 17).

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**THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY**
Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language
**The Schreyer Honors College**
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**SHAANXI NORMAL UNIVERSITY**
General Visiting Student
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## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

**PENN STATE DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS,** *Practicum Teacher*    January- May 2018
- Develop and lead classroom activities for international graduate students alongside a mentor teacher
- Reflect on teaching observations and experiences through weekly meetings and teaching journals

**PENN STATE DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS,** *Writing Tutor* August – December 2016
- Designed and led weekly writing tutoring sessions for four international undergraduate students
- Researched tutoring best practices and reflected on tutoring experiences in light of the research

**PENN STATE UNDERGRADUATE SPEAKING CENTER,** *Mentor*        September 2015 – May 2018
- Mentor fellow undergraduate students throughout all parts of the speech development process
- Present the Speaking Center to undergraduate classes

**VOLUNTEER ENGLISH TEACHING,** *Numerous Organizations*        September 2012 – December 2016
- Co-led weekly classes for intermediate adult English language learners of diverse ethnic backgrounds
- Led weekly discussion groups for intermediate adult Chinese background English language learners
- Developed weekly practical English lesson plans using provided material and personal ideas
- Assisted with American culture activities
- Tutored a nine-year-old Chinese girl at a beginning English speaking and literacy level

## RESEARCH

**PENN STATE SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE,** *Researcher and Thesis Writer* August 2016 – May 2018
- Formulated research questions regarding Chinese English learners' investment in the university classroom
- Designed instruments to explore research questions, including interview questions and a questionnaire
- Conducted classroom observation and interviews at a Chinese university
- Analyzed and interpreted data in an undergraduate honors thesis,

## LEADERSHIP

**STUDENT-OWNED LEARNING,** *Co-founder and Inaugural President*        January-December 2016
- Designed a university student-run cyber tutoring service to help underserved high school students in the Talent Search program across the state of Pennsylvania
- Coordinated with administrators at the high school and university level to launch the program
- Designed and lead a tutor training program for volunteer tutors

**THE PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP ACADEMY,** *Member*        September 2015 – May 2018
- Cultivate leadership skills through classes with the University President and Dean of the Honors College
- Research and construct a diversity policy for Penn State with seven other Academy members
- Discuss current events and public issues and deliberate about possible solutions