CSCHOLAR Publishing INC

Volume 1 Number 1 2025

# Journal of Literature & Language

https://jll.cscholar.com ISSN: 3067-9591

# Journal of Literature & Language

ISSN: 3067-9591

Volume 1, Issue 1, 2025

Twice a year (Issue No. 1)



**Editor-in-chief:**

Dr. Zheng Hua (Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, huazheng@sufe.edu.cn)

**Associate Editors**

Dr. Yiming Lin (Changji University, qinghuadx2019@sina.com)

**Editorial Board Member:**

Dr. Hao You (Chongqing Normal University, 20240077@cqnu.edu.cn)

Dr. Xiuwei Gao (Yunnan University, gaoxiuwei@ynu.edu.cn)

Dr. Chengwen Wang (Central University of Finance and Economics, wangcw@cufe.edu.cn)



**Cover Design:** ConnectSix Scholar Publishing INC

**Publishing Unit:** ConnectSix Scholar Publishing INC

**Publisher's website:** http://www.cscholar.com/

**Publisher's address:**

6547 N Academy Blvd #2265

Colorado Springs CO 80918

US

**Website of the *Journal of Literature & Language***:

https://jll.cscholar.com/

# Table of contents


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| An Analysis of the Beauty in *The Awakening* | Ting Zhang | 1-12 |
| Exploring the Negative Transfer Effect of Hanzhonghua Accent on English Pronunciation and Countermeasures Against it: A Case Study of an English Major from Shaanxi Province | Yuwen Zhang | 13-35 |
| Based on the Perspective of Feminist Theory, the Research on the Image of Women in Yu Hua's Novels | Xianfei Ke | 36-49 |
| Identity in Second Language Learning: Theoretical Perspectives and Research Trends with an Emphasis on Chinese as a Second Language | Mengke Li | 50-65 |
| Ethical Reconstruction of Linguistic Signs: An Ethical Study of Machine Translation Based on Linguistic Ontology | Zhaowei Liang, Wenzhou Shu | 66-75 |
| A Mixed Methods Study of Factors Influencing Chinese EFL Learners' Attitudes Towards Learning English Through Videos | Pengyu Wang | 76-95 |

Journal of Literature & Language, 2025, 1(1), 1-12
https://doi.org/10.71204/9xtrt664

# An Analysis of the Beauty in *The Awakening*

**Ting Zhang**[1,*]

[1] Tianjin Foreign Studies University, Tianjin 120000, China

*** Correspondence:**

Tingzhang

303740306@qq.com

*Received: 13 March 2025 /Accepted: 29 April 2025 /Published online: 2 May 2025*

**Abstract**

In 1899, Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening* was published, marking the culmination of her ideological and artistic development. However, its controversial themes surrounding female independence and sexuality led to its banning and Chopin's subsequent exclusion from the literary community, culminating in her obscurity and death five years later. Rediscovered in the 1950s and 1960s, the novel has since become a cornerstone of feminist literature, with its protagonist Edna emerging as an icon of female empowerment, challenging traditional marriage and societal norms in pursuit of self-actualization. This paper examines the multifaceted aesthetic dimensions of *The Awakening*, focusing on three key aspects: musicality, art, and the narrative of death. By analyzing how Chopin integrates these elements into her narrative, this study reveals how the novel transcends its historical context to offer profound insights into the human condition. The results highlight Chopin's innovative use of literary techniques to convey complex emotions and existential themes, ultimately reaffirming *The Awakening*'s significance as a pioneering work in feminist literature and modernist fiction. The conclusions drawn emphasize the enduring relevance of Chopin's exploration of female consciousness and the interplay between art, beauty, and mortality. Through the lenses of literary aesthetics, this study provides a structured analysis of how Chopin's work resonates deeply with contemporary audiences, inviting reflection on the timeless quest for freedom, identity, and the enduring power of art.

**Keywords:** Beauty; Musicality; Art; The Narrative of Death; *The Awakening*

## 1. Introduction

In 1899, Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening* was published, reflecting the culmination of her ideological and artistic development (Chopin, 2011). However, its controversial themes surrounding female independence and sexuality led to its banning and Chopin's subsequent exclusion from the literary community, culminating in her obscurity and death five years later. Rediscovered in the 1950s and 1960s, the novel has since become a cornerstone of feminist literature, with its protagonist Edna emerging as an icon of female empowerment, challenging

traditional marriage and societal norms in pursuit of self-actualization. As Gentry (13) notes, Edna is often described as "a woman who was ahead of her time, questioning the institution of marriage, having her own sexual desires, and being completely independent of her husband."

This paper examines the multifaceted aesthetic dimensions of *The Awakening*, focusing on three key aspects: musicality, art, and the narrative of death. Drawing on the principles of literary aesthetics, this study provides a structured analysis of how Chopin integrates these elements into her narrative to convey complex emotions and existential themes. By situating the novel within the aesthetic realm, the paper explores how Chopin's use of musical motifs, artistic imagery, and death as a narrative device transcends its historical context to offer profound insights into the human condition (Bonner, 1975).

The results highlight Chopin's innovative use of literary techniques to create a rich and evocative narrative that resonates deeply with readers. The analysis reveals how the novel's aesthetic qualities not only enhance its artistic value but also serve as a powerful medium for expressing the protagonist's journey of self-discovery and liberation. The conclusions drawn emphasize the enduring relevance of Chopin's exploration of female consciousness and the interplay between art, beauty, and mortality, reaffirming *The Awakening*'s significance as a pioneering work in feminist literature and modernist fiction.

## 2. Aesthetics as Methodology: Theoretical Framework and Research Approach

As a discipline studying the aesthetic relationship between humans and the world, aesthetics seeks to reveal how aesthetic experiences reconstruct the meaning of human existence. When Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten established "Aesthetica" in 1750, he defined it as the science of "perfection in sensory cognition"—a "perfection" that extends beyond formal harmony to encompass the spiritual awakening achieved through aesthetic practice. Immanuel Kant further endowed aesthetics with independence from utility, emphasizing "disinterested" aesthetic judgment as a bridge between individual sensibility and universal humanity. Placing *The Awakening* within this theoretical framework, Kate Chopin’s narrative emerges as a precise aesthetic experiment: through musicality, art, and death narrative, she constructs a spiritual map of 19th-century women breaking free from existential constraints through aesthetic practice.

### 2.1. Philosophical Foundations of Aesthetic Theory: From Baumgarten to Kant

Baumgarten’s "Aesthetica" provides the starting point for interpreting *The Awakening*. He argued that aesthetic experience is a cognitive process of "grasping the beauty of objects through intuition and emotion," with its highest form being the "perfection of sensory cognition." This idea materializes in Edna Pontellier’s awakening as a shift from "passive perception" to "active creation": her first encounter with Mademoiselle Reisz’s piano playing, which causes a "tremor in the soul," shatters the sensory blunting imposed by marriage and activates her autonomous capacity for aesthetic experience (Dyer, 1983). When she resumes painting, her canvases no longer serve as decorations to please her husband but become media for "reconstructing the world through sensory cognition"—her unfinished works and unconventional brushstrokes embody Baumgarten’s notion of sensory cognition progressing from "imperfection" toward "perfection."

Kant's concept of "disinterested" aesthetic judgment grants philosophical legitimacy to Edna's artistic pursuit (Camastra, 2008). In *Critique of Judgment*, Kant posited that true aesthetic experience transcends practical purposes, embodying "purposiveness without purpose." By refusing to paint for her husband's approval or market demands and insisting on creating in the independent space of the "pigeon house," Edna rejects utilitarian aesthetic hegemony. This modest studio becomes a "third kingdom of sensory cognition": neither an appendage of the patriarchal family ("purposeless") nor a social venue, it provides a realm for subjective self-confirmation ("purposive"). When she declares, "Painting makes me feel at ease and confident," she practices Kantian aesthetic autonomy—through pure artistic creation, she achieves the existential state where "humans are ends, not means."

### 2.2. The Intervention of Feminist Aesthetics: The Dual Mission of Deconstruction and Reconstruction

The "angel-madwoman" binary revealed by Gilbert and Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* essentially represents patriarchy's monopoly on female aesthetic discourse: the "angel" is a disciplined aesthetic object, while the "madwoman" is a subject who refuses to be gazed upon. Edna's awakening is a process of transforming between these two symbols: as a "household angel," her existence is reduced to functional roles of "wife" and "mother," with even her painting reduced to a decorative "accomplishment" for ladies. Reisz's music, however, acts as a hammer shattering this mirror, allowing Edna to realize in the "fusion of soul and eternal truth" that she is the subject, not the object, of aesthetic practice. This transformation echoes Elaine Showalter's argument in *A Literature of Their Own*: the mission of women's literature is to "reconstruct the sensory cognition distorted by patriarchy through art."

Virginia Woolf's aesthetic metaphor of "a room of one's own" finds material realization in Edna's studio. This space is not merely a physical shelter but a symbol of female aesthetic autonomy: her choice of colors (eschewing her husband's preferred soft tones for bold primaries) and her use of lines (rejecting academic meticulousness for intuitive ruggedness) deconstruct male-dominated aesthetic norms (Gilbert, 2020). When the art dealer Laidlaw acknowledges her paintings, Chopin implies a key proposition: once female aesthetic creation transcends gender prejudice, it can establish a universal "intersubjective common sense"—a real-world projection of Kant's "universality of aesthetic judgment."

### 2.3. The Aesthetic Sublimation of Death Narrative: From Individual Tragedy to Universal Symbol

Edna's death constitutes the novel's "aesthetic paradox": as the end of life, it becomes the ultimate perfection of sensory cognition. While Schopenhauer viewed death as the "liberation of the will to live," in Chopin's narrative, this liberation is transformed into a poetic aesthetic symbol: the sea embodies Baumgarten's ideal of "nature as the paradigm of sensory perfection," the eternal flow of its waves dissolves secular moral judgments, and Edna's outstretched body becomes a living metaphor for "sensory freedom." This aesthetics of death aligns with Schiller's theory of the "play drive"—when the real world's "kingdom of force" and "kingdom of ethics" cannot accommodate her awakening, death becomes a passage to the "aesthetic kingdom."

Hegel's "master-slave dialectic" adds a deeper dialectical meaning to death: by embracing death actively, Edna refuses to be an "acknowledged object," logically dissolving the binary structure of domination and subordination. Her death is not the end of tragedy but a "negation of negation" in spiritual progression— as Kant noted, the "necessity of aesthetic judgment is exemplary necessity," her choice transcends individual experience to become an "aesthetic model" for all oppressed souls (Gentry, 2006). When the narrator merges her body with nature, it realizes Baumgarten's ultimate ideal: through the unity of sensibility and nature, achieving aesthetic transcendence of human existential dilemmas.

### 2. 4. Aesthetics as a Critical Weapon: Chopin's Modernist Enlightenment

The aesthetic value of *The Awakening* lies in its dual criticality:

Deconstruction of Patriarchal Aesthetic Hegemony: Through music, painting, and death narrative, Chopin demonstrates that female sensory cognition is not the "weakness" or "appendage" defined by patriarchy but contains a powerful force to break free from discipline. Reisz's piano music and Edna's paintings directly challenge the aesthetic myth that "women lack creativity."

Supplement to Enlightenment Rationality: While Kant emphasized aesthetics as a "bridge between sensibility and reason," Chopin reveals that for women deprived of rational discourse, aesthetic practice is the sole channel for reconstructing subjectivity. Edna's awakening proves that the perfection of sensory cognition itself is a form of enlightenment—teaching women how to rediscover themselves through the creation of "beauty" in a disciplined world.

As Auguste Rodin famously said, "The world is not lacking in beauty, but in the eyes to discover it." Chopin illuminates the existential shadows of 19th-century women with the light of aesthetics, showing that when society denies women political and economic voice, the aesthetic realm becomes their last fortress. Here, music is the clarion call of awakening, painting the brush of resistance, and death the declaration of freedom. This ability to elevate life experience into aesthetic form is the timeless charm of *The Awakening* —more than a feminist literary classic, it is an eternal revelation of how humans can achieve self-redemption through "beauty."

## 3. The Beauty of Musicality

Music itself possesses unique aesthetic value, and when musicality is integrated into literary works, its value for aesthetic research becomes even more pronounced. This integration not only enriches the expressive power of literary works but also provides a unique perspective for interdisciplinary research. In Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, Woolf incorporates musicality into the work, creating a kind of "harmony" that transcends specific musical styles through her prose, allowing readers to experience rhythms and melodies similar to those of music while reading. In E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*, the author integrates the rhythmic characteristics of ragtime music into the language and structure of the novel, showcasing unique musical aesthetic value through the rhythmic variations of the text and the melodic sense of the narrative (Gu, 2002).

Music, as an art form in time, conveys emotions and artistic conception through elements such as melody, rhythm, and harmony, offering a unique aesthetic experience. It transcends linguistic barriers, directly affecting human senses and emotions, and evoking resonance. Musicality in literary works is mainly reflected in three aspects: rhythm and rhyme, emotional expression, and structure and form. Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* primarily reflects musical beauty in the latter aspect, that is, in terms of structure and form. Some literary works borrow structural forms from music, such as the multi-movement structure of symphonies or the counterpoint of fugues, to create unique narrative or lyrical structures (Jin, 2004).

Writing, in Kate Chopin's view, is to some extent the creation of an impromptu. Chopin had a strong interest in music throughout her life. She loved music and believed that it had the power to arouse the dormant passion in people's hearts, which clearly integrated her life and creation. In *The Awakening*, Chopin created an impromptu, which reflects the beauty of music in the structural skills of writing. An impromptu, as the name suggests, means improvisation or temporary patching; according to the *Oxford Dictionary of Music*, an impromptu is often "a short instrumental piece in the form of a song." This kind of music includes three parts in structure: the motif presentation, the contrasting middle section, and the varied ending. The structure of *The Awakening* reflects this beauty.

The motif of *The Awakening* is the sea refrain. According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music*, a motif is a short, recurring musical fragment or theme used to represent a person, object, or concept. In literature, a motif refers to a recurring image, symbol, or phrase that is associated with a specific person, object, or concept, with the purpose of influencing the structure and thematic expression of the novel. In *The Awakening*, the sea refrain is linked to the protagonist's awakening of feminine consciousness. In this recurring motif, Edna's self-awakens, and she truly grasps it, thus becoming the backbone of the novel's structure, running through the entire text.

To further develop the comparison of the novel's structure to an impromptu, a deeper textual analysis of rhythm, syntax, and phonetic patterns is necessary. For instance, the rhythmic patterns in Chopin's prose can be examined through the repetition of certain words and phrases, such as "voice," "sea," and "soul," which create a musical cadence. The syntax, particularly the use of long, flowing sentences interspersed with shorter, abrupt ones, mirrors the rhythmic variations found in musical compositions. This interplay of sentence lengths can be likened to the dynamic shifts in tempo and dynamics in music, contributing to the overall musicality of the text. Phonetically, the alliteration and assonance in key passages, such as "The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring," create a sonic texture that enhances the musical quality of the prose. These phonetic patterns not only contribute to the aesthetic experience but also reinforce the thematic elements of the novel, such as the sea's influence on Edna's awakening.

When Edna swims towards the sea for the last time, the novel's ending brings back the sea refrain. However, this time the sea refrain is varied: "The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude. All along the white beach, up and down, there was no living thing in sight." In music, changes in tempo and emphasis alter the atmosphere and effect created by the melody. The variation of this

motif indicates that her awakening has been established. At this moment, Edna sheds her roles as mother and wife, leaving behind only her most fundamental identity—her self.

The interlude between the two appearances of the sea motif is the lengthy evolution, the middle part of this improvisation. In the first part of the novel, on Grand Isle, the call of the sea never ceases for Edna. Later, when Edna returns to the city, the sea's call becomes monotonous and wearisome. Her infatuation with Robert lingers in her heart. Despite her joy and luxury at her evening parties, where she sits like a queen at the head of a long table with many guests revolving around her, she still feels "the old ennui overtaking her. And Outside the soft, monotonous splash of a fountain could be heard; the sound penetrated into the room with the heavy odor of jessamine that came through the open windows." This is a detail that is easily overlooked. Chopin uses the unceasing splash of the fountain—a surrogate for the sea—to suggest that Edna's personality and new consciousness continue to evolve.

In conclusion, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* can be seen as a musical composition, with the sea refrain serving as a recurring motif that drives the narrative forward. The novel's structure mirrors the form of an impromptu, with the sea refrain acting as the theme, the middle section representing the protagonist's evolution, and the varied ending signifying her ultimate self-realization. Chopin's use of the sea as a motif not only adds a layer of sensuality and atmosphere to the story but also serves as a powerful catalyst for Edna's awakening. Through the interplay of these musical elements, Chopin masterfully weaves together the themes of self-discovery, societal constraints, and the liberating power of nature, showcasing a kind of unique beauty and creating a rich and evocative narrative that resonates deeply with readers.

## 4. The Beauty of Art

Artistic beauty is a core concept in the field of aesthetics, encompassing not only the sensory pleasures constructed by formal elements such as color, line, and rhythm, but also the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual connotations carried by the work. The swirling brushstrokes and intense hues in Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, and the stirring melodies and rhythms in Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, both transform the artists' inner worlds into soul-touching aesthetic experiences through creative combinations of form. This spiritual communication transcending the material level makes art a bridge for emotional resonance and intellectual dialogue among humans — it is not merely a feast for the eyes or ears, but a secret spiritual covenant between the creator and the viewer (Mou, 2011).

In the patriarchal historical context, art was disciplined as an "elegant ornament" for women rather than a serious pursuit. During Jane Austen's era, painting and piano playing were essentially social markers of a lady's identity: these skills served as criteria for the marriage market rather than independent artistic endeavors. Nina Baym points out that it was not until the 1870s that women writers began to confront their own identities as artists — prior to this, women's artistic practices were always overshadowed by the dual shadows of "pastime" and "transgression." In Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Mademoiselle Reisz is a symbolic figure breaking this shackle: as a reclusive pianist, she refuses to be an "artistic decoration" in social

circles, and the intense emotions and spiritual power in her music become a sharp blade piercing through patriarchal aesthetic hegemony. When Edna feels the "fusion of soul and eternal truth" in Reisz's performance, art shifts from a disciplinary tool to a catalyst for awakening (Pizer, 2001).

Edna's trajectory of awakening aligns with the prototype transformation from "angel" to "madwoman" in *The Madwoman in the Attic*. As a traditional wife and mother, she initially embodied the "perfect angel" meticulously crafted by society: meekly fulfilling her maternal duties and dissolving her own will into the needs of her husband and family. However, Reisz's artistic world acts like a prism, refracting the falsity of this state of existence — the piano melodies awaken not only emotions but also the repressed self-awareness. When Edna picks up her paintbrush again and insists on moving into the "pigeon house," she completes her transformation from "angel" to "madwoman": the former is an empty symbol under patriarchy, while the latter is a genuine existence refusing to be defined (Ringe, 1972). This transformation is full of tearing: her painting no longer pursues the "elegance" recognized by the secular world, but confronts the inner struggles head-on; her studio is no longer a place for boudoir pastimes, but a spiritual fortress against alienation.

The three stages of women's literature proposed in *A Literature of Their Own* are clearly reflected in Edna's awakening. In the first "feminine" stage, she unconsciously follows society's aesthetic discipline for women, regarding art as a tool to embellish her identity (Showalter, 1999). The second "feminist" stage of resistance begins with her aversion to her marital subordinate status — when her husband opposes her painting pursuit, she insists on constructing an independent spiritual space in her studio, which is essentially a public challenge to the notion that "art belongs to the male creative domain." The third "female" stage of self-identification is manifested in her exploration of the essence of art: painting is no longer an escape from reality, but a medium for self-understanding — just as she reconstructs the world's perspective on the canvas, she is also reconstructing the subjectivity dismembered by patriarchy through artistic practice.

Mademoiselle Reisz's role transcends individual existence; she is a concrete expression of female artistic autonomy. As a professional artist, she embodies the creed that "art requires a brave heart" throughout her life — this "bravery" is not only the refinement of skills but also the continuous refusal of gender discipline. Her piano performances are juxtaposed with Edna's emotional awakening multiple times in the text: when Robert's letters are mired in the quagmire of secular love, Reisz's music leads Edna to a broader spiritual dimension. This narrative strategy implies that compared to dependent emotional relationships, art provides a more sustainable liberating force — it teaches women how to build a self-sufficient spiritual world in solitude and how to elevate individual experiences into universally meaningful aesthetic expressions.

The artistic awakening of women in the 19th century was always accompanied by the reconstruction of living spaces. Edna's "pigeon house" is not only a physical dwelling but also a literary prelude to Woolf's "a room of one's own": this small yet independent space carries her rejection of economic dependence (attempting to support herself by selling her paintings) and escape from social discipline (breaking free from the "wife-mother" role). Here, for the first time, she observes the world from an artist's perspective: "She begins to understand life in her own way,

no longer content to be a supporting character in someone else's narrative." This shift in perspective is precisely the artistic practice emphasized in *The Madwoman in the Attic* of "women reclaiming the right to gaze" — when women are no longer the objects depicted but the subjects holding the brushes, art becomes a scalpel for deconstructing gender power relations.

From the piano in Jane Austen's works to the music in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, art has always been a mirror of women's inner worlds in women's literature. Chopin's uniqueness lies in the dual mission she assigns to art: it is both a catalyst for individual awakening and a vehicle for social criticism. Edna's paintings never truly enter the market, a detail that ironically highlights the predicament of women's artistic practice — even after awakening, they still face the exclusion of the mainstream aesthetic mechanism. But Reisz's existence offers another possibility: even without recognition, art itself is already a complete answer to the meaning of existence — just as her music resonates in an empty room, the spiritual voice of women will eventually penetrate the silence of history, leaving its own chord in time.

When Edna gazes at her unfinished painting in the studio, and when Reisz plays the last note at dusk, they together inscribe a secret covenant between women and art: in this covenant, art is not only the presentation of beauty but also the practice of freedom; not only a display of skills but also a reconstruction of identity. Through such a narrative, Chopin proves that in an era when women are bound by multiple shackles, art is the gentlest yet most resilient form of resistance — it allows women to touch their true selves through pigments and piano keys, and to affirm their existential essence in creation. This affirmation is unrelated to secular success but fundamentally shakes the patriarchal cognitive foundation: when women begin to define art and beauty in their own ways, they have already completed a silent revolution in the aesthetic field.

## 5. The Beauty of Death Narrative

In art, the aesthetics of death are often manifested through forms such as tragedy, sublimity, symbolism, and metaphor. Tragedy and sublimity are frequently employed to reveal the complexity of human nature and the profundity of life through death. For example, Greek tragedies use the deaths of protagonists to illustrate the inevitability of fate, evoking a sense of resonance and sublimity among the audience. This confrontation with death is precisely what Hegel emphasized. Hegel argues that “death is the means by which the spirit overcomes the one-sidedness of individuality and immediacy”, representing a movement from “pure individuality to universal individuality. ” Through death, the individual transcends its finitude to achieve a higher form of spiritual freedom. Meanwhile, Schopenhauer also points out that “death is the cessation of the will”, an inevitable part of the cycle of life. Through death, individuals can be liberated from the pain and constraints of life, attaining a state of transcendent tranquility.

Symbolism and metaphor are also common devices. In Japanese literature, for example, the culture of “mono no aware” regards death as the ultimate form of beauty, emphasizing the beauty of transience and eternal tranquility. This perspective resonates with Schopenhauer's view of death. Life and death are the themes of human existence, and literature, as a reflection of life, has always treated death as an inexhaustible subject and an endless narrative resource. J. Hillis Miller

writes, “All storytellers speak under the shadow of death. Their narratives are a way of making a pact with death, and also a means of exorcising it. Only by ceaseless storytelling can the storyteller and the audience preserve their lives. Yet, the stories told always involve death. ” (Miller, 2003) This aligns with Hegel's view that “death is an inherent characteristic of human existence”, a necessary outcome of the movement of life itself. Through writing about death, people confront the meaning of existence and use death as a medium to express their understanding of life.

In narrative literature, the structural function of death is extremely important. It is both an essential component of the artistic form and a manifestation of the author's unique skill and method. (Tas, 2011) Hegel notes that “death is the reconciliation of the spirit with itself”, a necessary link in the development of human history. Many distinguished writers have elevated their works to the status of classics through death narratives, and Kate Chopin is no exception. Heidegger once said, "Death is not an event, but a phenomenon that needs to be grasped from an existential perspective." This is in line with Hegel's view that “death is a necessary means for human beings to achieve universality”. Through writing about death, people confront the meaning of existence and use death as a medium to express their understanding of life.

In Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, the shattering of a woman's pursuit of selfhood is ultimately presented through death. Edna's death narrative is, in fact, a profound interrogation of the existential problems faced by women at the time: Should she continue to live for others as a wife and mother, or should she live for herself ? Edna could choose to live comfortably in the world of others, but this would come at the cost of sacrificing her own self, a way of life she was gradually trying to escape. When her children were taken away, her husband was out of town, and she moved into the "pigeon house," she experienced a complex feeling of "descending in social status but ascending in spirit." Every step she took to free herself from her obligations added to her strength and allowed her to fully develop her individuality.

Despite gradually shedding the roles imposed on her by society and achieving a sense of self, Edna also faced societal condemnation. When Edna's husband realized she was no longer as compliant as before, he clearly saw that "she was no longer the woman she was, day by day discarding her former false self." He even sought medical help, thinking she had a mental problem. Robert, who loved her deeply, was also a traditional man, unable to break free from the constraints of moral customs (Sun, 2011). He believed that only if Edna's husband granted her freedom could she truly be free. He did not want to be involved in a scandalous love affair with her. Although he loved Edna deeply, he ultimately chose to leave. Adèle, on the other hand, urged her to think about the children and be a good mother, but in Edna's eyes, the children had become "conquerors of her." In pursuit of spiritual freedom and to avoid being possessed by others, Edna chose to walk into the sea and return to herself. In fact, the narrator provided Edna with a path of self-pursuit—a path that realized her spiritual pursuit through the death of the flesh (Wang, 2011).

Hegel argues that “death is a necessary condition for human freedom”; only by confronting death can humans achieve true freedom. Edna's death, in this sense, represents her liberation from societal constraints and the fulfillment of her quest for freedom. Her death is not an act of escape but an ultimate affirmation of her existence. Schopenhauer, on the other hand, posits that “death is

the end of life but also the liberation of the will" (Woolf, 2019). Edna's death can be seen as a form of release; through it, she escapes the pain and constraints of life, achieving a state of transcendent tranquility. Her death is not only an affirmation of her selfhood but also a profound contemplation of the meaning of life.

The author's choice to conclude with Edna's return to nature through death was not out of fear or despair, but rather the best proof of maintaining "self" and the best way to grasp freedom and existence. This is in line with Hegel's view that death is a necessary means for human beings to achieve universality. Through death, Edna realized the most thorough and complete expression of her life's meaning. When contemplating life, she reflects, "The past was nothing to her; offered no lesson which she was willing to heed. The future was a mystery which she never attempted to penetrate. The present alone was significant; was hers....."(Chopin, 48) . When her sense of self was threatened, Edna decided to take control of her own destiny, using death to pursue herself.

The death narrative in *The Awakening* is undoubtedly an embodiment of the aesthetic realm. It represents a kind of spiritual beauty and the sublimation of the soul. Through the death narrative, the author liberates the characters' bodies and spirits to the greatest extent, achieving the most direct and highest level of freedom. This aligns with the views of Hegel and Schopenhauer, who both regard death not merely as the end of life but as a means of elevating the meaning of life. Through this narrative, the author enlightens the readers' souls on the deepest spiritual level, prompting them to re-examine the meaning of self and existence when confronted with the ultimate question of life and death.

## 6. Conclusions

In summary, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* stands as a profound exploration of the human condition and a remarkable display of literary beauty. Through the lenses of musicality, art, and death narrative, we have uncovered the rich aesthetic layers of this seminal work. Chopin skillfully integrates musical elements into the narrative structure, using the recurring motif of the sea and the form of an impromptu to reflect the inner world and journey of awakening of the protagonist, Edna. Additionally, the novel's engagement with art not only enriches its aesthetic dimension but also challenges traditional gender roles and social expectations. Edna's pursuit of self-expression and liberation through painting and music embodies the symbolic power of art as a force for spiritual freedom.

The death narrative in *The Awakening* reaches an emotional and philosophical climax. Edna's ultimate choice is not only a quest for freedom but also a rebellion against the constraints of a patriarchal society. Her death becomes a form of ultimate self-affirmation, reflecting Hegel's philosophical view of death as a necessary condition for human freedom. Through death, Edna achieves complete control over her own identity, transcending societal limitations to attain a state of spiritual liberation and freedom.

As a testament to Chopin's literary genius, *The Awakening* continues to resonate with contemporary readers with its profound emotional and aesthetic appeal. It explores timeless themes of women's quest for freedom, identity, and the enduring power of art, inviting readers to

reflect on the nature of the human spirit. The novel's pioneering status in feminist literature and modernist fiction makes it a significant milestone in literary history. Chopin's exploration of female consciousness and her profound insights into the interplay between art, beauty, and mortality not only enrich our understanding of the work but also provide a powerful perspective on the complexities of human experience.

**Author Contributions:**

Conceptualization, T. Z.; methodology, T. Z.; software, T. Z.; validation, T. Z.; formal analysis, T. Z.; investigation, T. Z.; resources, T. Z.; data curation, T. Z.; writing ─ original draft preparation, T. Z.; writing ─ review and editing, T. Z.; visualization, T. Z.; supervision, T. Z.; project administration, T. Z.; funding acquisition, T. Z. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:**

This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:**

Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:**

Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:**

Not applicable.

**Acknowledgments:**

I am deeply grateful to my advisor, Editor Wang, for his invaluable guidance and support throughout this journey. Their insights and encouragement have been instrumental in shaping this work.Special thanks go to my family for their unwavering love and understanding. Their constant support has been my greatest strength.I would also like to thank my friends and colleagues for their companionship and inspiration. Their perspectives have enriched my understanding and broadened my horizons.Lastly, I am thankful for the opportunity to engage with such a fascinating subject. The process of exploring and writing has been both challenging and rewarding.

**Conflict of Interest:**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**References**

Bonner, T. (1975). Kate Chopin's European Consciousness. American Literary Realism, 8(3), 281-284.

Camastra, N. (2008). Venerable Sonority in Kate Chopin's" The Awakening". American Literary Realism, 40(2), 154-166..

Chopin, K. (2011). The Awakening. Harper Press.

Dyer, J. C. (1983). Epiphanies Through Nature in the Stories of Kate Chopin. University of Dayton Review, 16(3), 12.

Gentry, D. S. (2006). The Art of Dying: Suicide in the Works of Kate Chopin and Sylvia Plath (Vol. 56). Peter Lang.

Gilbert, S. M., & Gubar, S. (2020). The madwoman in the attic: The woman writer and the nineteenth-century literary imagination. Yale University Press.

Gu, H. L. (2002). The Construction and Deconstruction of Female Subjectivity in The Awakening. Journal of Sichuan International Studies University, 18(1), 54-56.

Jin, L. (2004). Women in Literature and Women's Literature. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

Miller, J. H. (2003). Reading Narrative. Peking University Press.

Mou, X. (2011). Kate Chopin's Narrative Techniques and Separate Space in The Awakening. The Southern Literary Journal, 44(1), 103-120.

Pizer, D. (2001). A Note on Kate Chopin's The Awakening as Naturalistic Fiction. The Southern Literary Journal, 33(2), 5-13.

Ringe, D. A. (1972). Romantic Imagery in Kate Chopin's The Awakening. American Literature, 43(4), 580-588.

Showalter, E. (1999). A literature of their own: British women novelists from Brontë to Lessing. Princeton University Press.

Sun, S. Z. (2011). The Split Personality and Illusory Dreams—On the Bildungsroman of Awakening Women in The Awakening. Foreign Literature, (2), 89-96.

Tas, M. R. (2011 ). Kate Chopin's The Awakening in the light of Freud's structural model of the psyche. The Journal of International Social Research. 4(19), 413-418.

Wang, H. (2011). On the Aesthetic Realm of Tranquility in The Awakening. Foreign Literature, (3), 108-113.

Woolf, V. (2019). A Room of One's Own. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

Journal of Literature & Language, 2025, 1(1), 13-35
https://doi.org/10.71204/wv9n4360

# Exploring the Negative Transfer Effect of Hanzhonghua Accent on English Pronunciation and Countermeasures Against it: A Case Study of an English Major from Shaanxi Province

**Yuwen Zhang**[1, *]

[1] College of International Studies, Shenzhen University, Shenzhen 515100, China

***Correspondence:**
Yuwen Zhang

3133507769@qq.com

*Received: 25 March 2025 /Accepted: 20 April 2025 /Published online: 2 May 2025*

**Abstract**

Pronunciation is a crucial aspect of second language acquisition, directly affecting comprehensibility, fluency, and communication effectiveness. However, many English learners struggle with pronunciation due to the influence of their first language or regional dialects. This study explores the negative transfer effect of the Hanzhonghua accent on English pronunciation through a case study of an English major from Shaanxi Province, China. It aims to analyze phonetic interference and explore training solutions. The research combines qualitative and quantitative methods: phonetic transcription of a participant's recording to identify errors, and a survey to assess intelligibility and communication impact. Results show the accent reduces intelligibility, with listeners understanding only 53.83% of the passage. It affects pronunciation quality by 66% and hinders communication by 60.92%. Key issues are divided into two parts: segmental errors and suprasegment errors. To address these, the study proposes a structured phonetic training approach. It highlights the need for targeted training in dialect-sensitive contexts, contributing empirical evidence on dialectal interference.

**Keywords:** Negative Transfer; Hanzhonghua Accent; English Pronunciation; Phonetic Training; Second Language Acquisition

## 1. Introduction

Pronunciation plays a crucial role in second language acquisition (SLA) as it directly affects intelligibility, fluency, and communication effectiveness. Accurate pronunciation not only facilitates clear speech production but also impacts a speaker’s confidence and comprehensibility in real-life conversations (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). However, for Chinese learners of English, phonological differences between Chinese dialects and English often lead to pronunciation difficulties. Among these dialects, Hanzhonghua, a subdialect of Southwestern Mandarin spoken in Hanzhong, Shaanxi Province, has unique phonetic characteristics that can significantly

interfere with English pronunciation. The negative transfer of a learner's first language (L1) phonology into a second language (L2) is a well-documented phenomenon in SLA research. Studies on phonetic interference suggest that when learners encounter unfamiliar phonemes in the target language, they tend to substitute these sounds with the closest equivalents from their native dialect (Lado, 1957). This process, known as negative transfer, can lead to persistent pronunciation errors that reduce intelligibility and fluency. In the case of Hanzhonghua speakers, their distinctive vowel and consonant articulations, as well as suprasegment features, pose significant challenges for English pronunciation.

Therefor, this study aims to investigate the negative transfer effect of the Hanzhonghua accent on English pronunciation and propose effective countermeasures to mitigate its impact. The research is guided by the following objectives: (1) to identify the specific phonetic features of Hanzhonghua that interfere with English pronunciation; (2) to analyze the extent to which the Hanzhonghua accent affects intelligibility and perceived English quality, based on listener feedback; and (3) to develop and evaluate phonetic training methods that can help learners reduce accent-related pronunciation errors. The study seeks to answer the following questions: (1) What are the most common pronunciation errors caused by the negative transfer of the Hanzhonghua accent? (2) How does this accent influence listener comprehension and perceptions of English quality? (3) What phonetic training strategies can effectively address these pronunciation difficulties?

This study contributes to the growing body of research on dialectal interference in English pronunciation by providing empirical data on Hanzhonghua speakers. While previous studies have examined general Chinese-English phonetic transfer, limited research has focused on regional dialectal influences. By pinpointing specific segmental and suprasegmental pronunciation issues, this study offers insights that can enhance English language teaching (ELT) methodologies in dialect-speaking regions. Furthermore, the study has practical implications for English learners, educators, and curriculum developers. By identifying effective pronunciation training techniques, the findings can help language instructors design targeted pronunciation curricula that cater to students from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Negative Transfer in Second Language Acquisition

Language transfer, a key concept in second language acquisition (SLA), refers to the influence of a learner's first language (L1) on the acquisition of a second language (L2). According to Lado (1957), when the phonetic, syntactic, or lexical features of L1 differ significantly from those of L2, learners often experience negative transfer, leading to persistent errors. Phonetic transfer is particularly pronounced because pronunciation habits formed in early childhood can be difficult to change.

Odlin (1989) classifies negative transfer effects into two main types:

(1) Segmental errors, which involve mispronunciations of individual sounds due to phonemic

differences between L1 and L2.

(2) Suprasegmental errors, which include issues related to intonation, stress, and rhythm, often causing unnatural speech patterns.

Studies on Chinese learners of English have shown that negative transfer occurs when learners substitute English phonemes with their closest approximations in Mandarin or regional dialects (Hao, 2020). For example, many Chinese speakers struggle with the /θ/ and /ð/ sounds, replacing them with /s/ and /d/ respectively, because these phonemes do not exist in Mandarin or most Chinese dialects (Deterding, 2006).

### 2.2. Dialectal Influence on English Pronunciation

While Standard Mandarin (Putonghua) serves as the official language in China, regional dialects exhibit significant phonological variations, leading to further challenges in English pronunciation. Several studies have explored how different Chinese dialects interfere with English phonetics:

(1) Northern Mandarin Accents: Research by Huang (2023) found that Liaoning learners tend to add rhotic sounds to English words, mimicking their regional accent's influence. Additionally, some speakers extend final syllables, disrupting natural English prosody.

(2) Southern Dialects: Cantonese and Hokkien speakers often have difficulty distinguishing between /l/ and /n/ and may omit final consonants, affecting their English clarity (Chan & Li, 2000).

(3) Southwestern Mandarin Variants: Wu & Yang (2014) identified specific phonetic deviations in Hanzhonghua speakers, particularly in vowel pronunciation and consonant articulation. Their research suggested that speakers of Hanzhonghua frequently confuse /n/ and /l/ and struggle with certain vowel distinctions, which may hinder their ability to produce clear English sounds.

### 2.3. Phonetic Features of Hanzhonghua and Their Impact on English Pronunciation

Hanzhonghua, a subdialect of Southwestern Mandarin, differs from Standard Mandarin in several key phonetic aspects that may negatively transfer to English pronunciation:

#### 2.3.1. Vowel System Differences

Hanzhonghua exhibits a reduced vowel inventory compared to English, leading to vowel substitution errors in L2 speech:

(1) Merging of front vowels: Hanzhonghua speakers may struggle to distinguish /æ/ and /ɪ/, leading to errors such as salley (/ˈsæli/) pronounced as [ˈsɪli].

(2) Overuse of back vowels: Sounds like /ʌ/ and /ɑː/ are often replaced with a single back vowel, making words like love (/lʌv/) sound like lava (/lɑːvə/).

(3) Simplification of diphthongs: The English diphthong /əʊ/ is often replaced by a monophthong [u:], causing words like grow (/grəʊ/) to be pronounced as gru: [gru:].

#### 2.3.2. Consonant Substitution Patterns

(1) Dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ do not exist in Hanzhonghua, leading speakers to replace them with /s/ and /d/ respectively (e.g., the /ðə/ → [də]).

(2) Final consonant deletion: Many Hanzhonghua speakers omit final consonants, particularly in words ending in -d or -t (e.g., field /fiːld/ → [fiːl]).

#### 2.3.3. Suprasegmental Features

Hanzhonghua exhibits a flatter intonation pattern compared to English, leading to:

(1) Monotonous speech delivery, reducing expressiveness.

(2) Lack of stress distinction, making spoken English sound unnatural.

These phonetic traits can significantly impact intelligibility and communication effectiveness, necessitating targeted pronunciation training.

## 3. Methodology

This study employs a case study approach to examine the negative transfer effect of the Hanzhonghua accent on English pronunciation. The research integrates phonetic analysis and perception-based evaluation through recordings and listener assessments.

### 3.1. Research Design

The study is qualitative and quantitative in nature, focusing on both phonetic deviations and perceptual evaluations. It consists of the following steps:

(1) Pronunciation Recording and Phonetic Analysis: The participant read a 91-word passage, which was analyzed to identify pronunciation errors.

(2) Perception-Based Assessment: A questionnaire survey was conducted among seven college students to evaluate the intelligibility and perceived quality of the speaker's English.

(3) Error Classification and Discussion: The identified errors were categorized into segmental (vowel/consonant) and suprasegmental (intonation, stress) deviations, followed by an analysis of their impact on comprehensibility.

### 3.2. Participant Selection

The participant is a 20-year-old English major from Hanzhong, Shaanxi Province, who has spoken Hanzhonghua as their first language since childhood. The subject was chosen based on the following criteria:

(1) Strong Hanzhonghua Accent: The participant's English exhibits clear phonetic characteristics influenced by Hanzhonghua.

(2) Intermediate English Proficiency: The subject has received formal English education but continues to struggle with pronunciation.

### 3.3. Data Collection Methods

#### 3.3.1. Pronunciation Recording and Phonetic Transcription

The participant was asked to read the following 91-word passage aloud:

DOWN BY THE SALLEY GARDENS

"Down by the Salley gardens my love and I did meet;

She passed the Salley gardens with little snow-white feet.

She bid me take love easy, as the leaves grow on the tree;

But I, being young and foolish, with her did not agree.

In a field by the river my love and I did stand,

And on my leaning shoulder she laid her snow-white hand.

She bid me take life easy, as the grass grows on the weirs;

But I was young and foolish, and now I am full of tears."

(William Butler Yeats, 1888)

The recording was phonetically transcribed, comparing the standard pronunciation with the participant's pronunciation to identify systematic errors.

#### 3.3.2. Listener Perception Test (Questionnaire Survey)

According to Munro and Derwing (1995), listener familiarity with specific accents can increase tolerance for non-native features and potentially skew evaluations. To enhance the objectivity of future perception assessments, listeners with minimal or no prior exposure to Hanzhonghua dialect are selected, including native Standard Mandarin speakers and native English speakers.

A questionnaire-based assessment was conducted with 50 volunteers (10 native English speakers, 20 native Standard Mandarin speakers, 20 native Cantonese speakers with good spoken English). The listeners were asked to evaluate the speaker's pronunciation based on three criteria:

(1) Comprehensibility: How much of the passage they could understand.

(2) Accent Interference: The extent to which the accent affected the quality of English.

(3) Communication Difficulty: The degree to which the accent hindered normal communication.

The results were quantified using a Likert scale (0-100%), with lower scores indicating greater difficulties in comprehension and communication.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed through two primary methods:

(1) Phonetic Analysis: Segmental and suprasegmental errors were categorized, focusing on vowel shifts, consonant substitutions, and prosodic features.

(2) Statistical Evaluation: Questionnaire responses were averaged to determine overall perceptions of pronunciation quality.

### 3.5. Justification of Case Selection and Pronunciation Task

This study adopts a single-case design, focusing on an English major from Hanzhong, Shaanxi Province, whose spoken English exhibits marked features of L1 dialect interference. The decision to focus on a single participant is grounded in the goals of exploratory phonetic research. According to Duff (2008), single-case studies are particularly useful for capturing complex, context-dependent phenomena, especially in under-explored linguistic settings. In pronunciation research, such designs allow for a detailed, fine-grained analysis of individual learners' speech production and accent features (Yin, 2018). Moreover, they enable researchers to trace specific L1-to-L2 phonological transfer patterns that may be diluted or overlooked in group studies (McKay, 2006).

Although the generalizability of findings is limited in single-subject designs, the approach is valuable in highlighting representative linguistic behaviors, especially when the goal is not statistical inference but phonetic insight (Mackey & Gass, 2016). The selected participant demonstrated a strong Hanzhonghua accent and consistent pronunciation difficulties, making them an ideal case for investigating the phonological impact of regional dialect on English speech. Such depth-oriented case studies often serve as pilot work for broader, mixed-method research or comparative studies involving multiple dialect speakers.

And the pronunciation task selected for this study is the poem "Down by the Salley Gardens" by W. B. Yeats. The rationale for choosing this poem lies in its rich combination of phonetic and prosodic features. It contains a variety of English vowels, consonants, and diphthongs—including sounds that are often mispronounced by Chinese learners, such as [ð], [v], [æ], and [əʊ]—making it highly suitable for detecting segmental errors (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). In addition, its clear rhythmic structure and predictable stress patterns offer a strong foundation for analyzing suprasegmental features like intonation, stress, and rhythm (Murphy, 2017).

What's more, unlike word lists or isolated sentences, poetry provides a semi-natural context in which learners produce connected speech, thus allowing researchers to observe fluency, pausing, and phrasing (Gilbert, 2008). The poem's moderate length and familiar thematic content reduce cognitive load, helping participants focus on pronunciation rather than comprehension. Therefore, both the case and the task were carefully chosen to optimize the accuracy and depth of accent-related error analysis.

## 4. Results

This section presents the findings of the study, including quantitative results from the listener perception test and qualitative phonetic analysis of the participant's pronunciation errors. The results are categorized into comprehensibility, accent interference, and communication difficulty, followed by a detailed phonetic transcription and error classification.

### 4.1. Listener Perception Test Results

#### 4.1.1. Summary of Questionnaire Responses

The questionnaire results from 50 volunteers who evaluated the participant's pronunciation are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. Questionnaire Results**

| Question | Average Score (%) |
|---|---|
| Comprehensibility (Q1): How much of the passage could you understand? | 53.83 |
| Accent Interference (Q2): To what extent did the accent affect the quality of English? | 66 |
| Communication Difficulty (Q3): How much did the accent hinder normal communication? | 60.92 |

#### 4.1.2. Key Observations from the Questionnaire

(1) Low comprehensibility (53.83%): On average, listeners understood less than half of the passage. Two listeners even reported that they initially did not recognize the passage as English.

(2) Strong accent interference (66%): The speaker's accent significantly reduced the perceived quality of English.

(3) High communication difficulty (60.92%): Listeners found it challenging to understand and engage with the speaker due to pronunciation deviations.

These results highlight the negative impact of the Hanzhonghua accent on English intelligibility and communication, reinforcing the need for targeted pronunciation training.

### 4.2. Phonetic Analysis of Pronunciation Errors

The participant's pronunciation was transcribed and compared with Standard English phonetic transcription. Systematic errors were identified and categorized into segmental (vowel/consonant) and suprasegmental (intonation, rhythm, stress) deviations.

**Standard Pronunciation:**

/dɑʊn baɪ ðə ˈsæli ˈgɑːrdnz maɪ lʌv ənd aɪ dɪd miːt/

/ʃiː pɑːst ðə ˈsæli ˈgɑːrdnz wɪð ˈlɪtl snəʊ-ˌwaɪt fiːt/

/ʃiː bɪd miː teɪk lʌv ˈiːzi, æz ðə liːvz grəʊ ɒn ðə triː/

/bʌt aɪ, ˈbiːɪŋ jʌŋ ənd ˈfuːlɪʃ, wɪð hər dɪd nɒt əˈgriː/

/ɪn ə fiːld baɪ ðə ˈrɪvə maɪ lʌv ənd aɪ dɪd stænd/

/ænd ɒn maɪ ˈliːnɪŋ ˈʃəʊldə ʃiː leɪd hər snəʊ-ˌwaɪt hænd/

/ʃiː bɪd miː teɪk laɪf ˈiːzi, æz ðə grɑːs grəʊz ɒn ðə wɪrz/

/bʌt aɪ wəz jʌŋ ənd ˈfuːlɪʃ, ənd naʊ aɪ əm fʊl əv tɪəz/

**Participant's Pronunciation** (The error sections are underlined.):

[dɑʊn baɪ də ˈsɪli ˈgɑːrdnz maɪ lɑː ənd aɪ dɪd miːt ]

[ʃiː pɑːst də ˈsɪli ˈgɑːrdnz wɪs ˈlɪtl sləʊ-ˌwaɪt fɪt ]

[ʃiː bɪd miː teɪk lɑː ˈiːzi, æz də liːvz gruː ɒn də triː ]

[bʌt aɪ, ˈbiːɪŋ jʌŋ ənd ˈfɔːrlɪʃ, wɪs hər dɪd nɒ əˈgreɪ ]

[ɪn ə fiːl baɪ də ˈrɪvə maɪ lɑː ənd aɪ dɪd stɑːnd ]

[ænd ɒn maɪ ˈliːnɪŋ ˈʃəʊldə ʃiː leɪd hər sləʊ-ˌwaɪt hɑː ]

[ʃiː bɪd miː teɪk laɪf ˈiːzi, æz də grɑːs gruːz ɒn də wɪrz ]

[bʌt aɪ wəz jʌŋ ənd ˈfɔːrlɪʃ, ənd nəʊ aɪ əm fɔːr əv tɪəz ]

### 4.2.1. Segmental Errors (Vowel and Consonant Deviations)

**Table 2. Vowel Substitutions**

| Word | Standard Pronunciation | Participant's Pronunciation | Error Type |
|---|---|---|---|
| salley | /ˈsæli/ | /ˈsɪli/ | [æ]→[ɪ] (front vowel shift) |
| love | /lʌv/ | /lɑːv/ | [ʌ]→[ɑː] (central-to-back vowel shift) |
| grow | /grəʊ/ | /gruː/ | [əʊ]→[uː] (diphthong simplification) |
| stand | /stænd/ | /stɑːnd/ | [æ]→[ɑː] (front-to-back vowel shift) |
| feet | /fiːt/ | /fɪt/ | [iː] → [ɪ] (long-to-short vowel substitution) |
| foolish | /ˈfuːlɪʃ/ | /ˈfɔːlɪʃ/ | [uː] → [ɔː] (Back Vowel Shift) |
| full | /fʊl/ | /fɔːl/ | [ʊ] → [ɔː] (Back Vowel Shift) |

| Word | Standard Pronunciation | Participant's Pronunciation | Error Type |
|---|---|---|---|
| now | /naʊ/ | /nəʊ/ | [æ] → [ɑː] (Front-to-Back Shift) |
| hand | /hænd/ | /hɑːnd | [æ] → [ɑː] (Front-to-Back Shift) |
| agree | /əˈgriː/ | /əˈgreɪ/ | [iː] → [eɪ] (Vowel Quality & Length Change) |

#### 4.2.1.1. Vowel Error Analysis and Summary:

The phonetic analysis revealed 10 vowel mispronunciations, affecting front vowels, central vowels, back vowels, and diphthongs. These errors align with the phonetic characteristics of the Hanzhonghua accent, indicating a strong negative transfer effect from the speaker's first language (L1) to English pronunciation.

(1) Front Vowel Errors

- [æ] → [ɪ] or [ɑː]

Example words: salley (/ˈsæli/) → [ˈsɪli], stand (/stænd/) → [stɑːnd]

Analysis: The speaker fails to maintain the distinction between /æ/ and other vowels. The substitution of [æ] with [ɪ] results in a raised tongue position, while the [æ] → [ɑː] shift indicates a tendency to use back vowels instead of front vowels. This pattern aligns with findings from Wu & Yang (2014), who noted similar front vowel confusion among Hanzhonghua speakers.

- [iː] → [ɪ]

Example word: feet (/fiːt/) → [fɪt]

Analysis: The speaker shortens the long vowel [iː] to its lax counterpart [ɪ], which reduces vowel contrast and affects intelligibility. This reflects a common issue among Chinese learners of English, as noted by Deterding (2006), where long-short vowel distinctions are often overlooked.

- [iː] → [eɪ]

Example word: agree (/əˈgriː/) → [əˈgreɪ]

Analysis: This shift suggests an incorrect vowel quality and length change, likely influenced by Mandarin's limited vowel distinctions. The substitution of [iː] with [eɪ] disrupts the natural pronunciation of the word.

(2) Central Vowel Errors

- [ʌ] → [ɑː]

Example words: love (/lʌv/) → [lɑːv], hand (/hænd/) → [hɑːnd]

Analysis: The speaker replaces the central vowel [ʌ] with the back vowel [ɑː], making words sound unnaturally "heavy" or elongated. This issue likely stems from the absence of a clear /ʌ/ sound in Hanzhonghua, causing the speaker to approximate it with a back vowel.

(3) Back Vowel Errors

- [uː] → [ɔː]

Example word: foolish (/ˈfuːlɪʃ/) → [ˈfɔːrlɪʃ]

Analysis: The substitution of [uː] with [ɔː] results in a more open and back articulation, indicating difficulty maintaining the high, rounded vowel [uː].

- [ʊ] → [ɔː]

Example word: full (/fʊl/) → [fɔːl]

Analysis: Similar to the [uː] → [ɔː] error, this mispronunciation suggests a preference for back vowels over rounded vowels, likely due to L1 influence.

(4) Diphthong Errors

- [əʊ] → [uː]

Example word: grow (/grəʊ/) → [gruː]

Analysis: The diphthong [əʊ] is simplified into a monophthong [uː], reducing vowel movement. This reflects a common trait among Chinese learners, where diphthongs are often over-simplified into single vowel sounds (Duanmu, 2007).

- [aʊ] → [əʊ]

Example word: now (/naʊ/) → [nəʊ]

Analysis: The back diphthong [aʊ] is replaced with [əʊ], which alters the natural pronunciation pattern of the word. This suggests a difficulty in maintaining diphthong dynamics, a pattern observed in previous studies on Chinese English learners.

**4.2.1.2. Summary of Vowel Errors**

(1) The speaker struggles with vowel distinctions, particularly front and central vowels.

- [æ] is often replaced with [ɪ] or [ɑː], weakening vowel contrast.
- [ʌ] is replaced with [ɑː], leading to unnatural word pronunciation.

(2) Diphthongs are consistently simplified into monophthongs.

- [əʊ] → [uː] and [aʊ] → [əʊ], making words sound flatter and less dynamic.

(3) Long vowels tend to be shortened or misarticulated.

- [iː] → [ɪ] (feet → [fɪt])
- [iː] → [eɪ] (agree → [əˈgreɪ])

(4) The preference for back vowels affects clarity.

- The speaker overuses [ɑː] and [ɔː], altering word pronunciation.

These findings confirm that the Hanzhonghua accent negatively affects vowel pronunciation in English, leading to reduced intelligibility and unnatural articulation.

**Table 3. Consonant Errors**

| Word | Standard Pronunciation | Participant's Pronunciation | Error Type |
|---|---|---|---|
| the | /ðə/ | /də/ | [ð] → [d] (dental fricative to alveolar stop shift) |
| with | /wɪð/ | /vɪs/ | [ð] → [s], [w] → [v] (fricative shift & Glide-to-Fricative Shift) |
| snow | /snəʊ/ | /sləʊ/ | [n] → [l] (nasal-liquid confusion) |
| not | /nɒt/ | /nɒ/ | Final /t/ deletion |
| field | /fiːld/ | /fiːld/ | Final /d/ deletion |

#### 4.2.1.3. Consonant Error Analysis and Summary

The phonetic analysis revealed five major types of consonant errors, which align with the phonetic characteristics of Hanzhonghua. These errors affect both individual phonemes and syllable structures, reducing intelligibility.

(1) Dental Fricative to Alveolar Stop Shift

- [ð] → [d]

Example words: the (/ðə/) → [də], with (/wɪð/) → [vɪs]

Analysis: The speaker replaces the voiced dental fricative [ð] with the alveolar stop [d], which is a common error among Chinese learners. Hanzhonghua does not have /θ/ or /ð/ sounds, leading to a natural substitution with the closest available phoneme in the L1 inventory. Similar patterns have been observed in Cantonese and Mandarin speakers (Deterding, 2006).

(2) Fricative Shift & Glide-to-Fricative Shift

- [ð] → [s], [w] → [v]

Example word: with (/wɪð/) → [vɪs]

Analysis: The substitution of [ð] with [s] suggests that the speaker perceives [ð] as a non-voiced fricative, leading to confusion. Additionally, the shift of [w] to [v] indicates a difficulty in maintaining bilabial glides, which are less common in Hanzhonghua.

(3) Nasal-to-Liquid Shift

- [n] → [l]

Example word: snow (/snəʊ/) → [sləʊ]

Analysis: The mispronunciation of [n] as [l] aligns with Wu & Yang's (2014) findings that Hanzhonghua speakers often confuse these two phonemes. This reduces nasal airflow, affecting word clarity.

(4) Final Consonant Deletion

- Final /t/ and /d/ deletion

Example words: not (/nɒt/) → [nɒ], field (/fiːld/) → [fiːl]

Analysis: The deletion of final stops like /t/ and /d/ weakens syllable structure, making speech sound incomplete. This is a common issue among Chinese learners, as final consonants are less frequent and less pronounced in Mandarin and Hanzhonghua (Duanmu, 2007).

#### 4.2.1.4. Summary of Consonant Errors

(1) Dental fricatives ([ð]) are consistently replaced with stops ([d]) or other fricatives ([s]), reducing phoneme contrast.

(2) Glide-to-fricative shifts ([w]→[v]) occur, affecting smoothness in articulation.

(3) Nasal-liquid confusion ([n]→ [l]) is prominent, reflecting a key phonological feature of Hanzhonghua.

(4) Final consonant deletion is common, leading to weakened syllable structure and reduced speech clarity.

These findings also confirm that Hanzhonghua speakers face significant challenges in maintaining English consonant distinctions, impacting intelligibility and fluency.

### 4.2.2. Suprasegmental Errors (Intonation, Rhythm, and Stress)

Allen (1971) provides a broad definition of intonation, describing it as a linguistic feature that encompasses both rhythm and melody. It is created through variations in pitch, loudness, stress, and pause duration. In this context, intonation is similar to the concepts of prosody or suprasegmental features. This broad perspective on intonation is commonly accepted, as it typically refers to the manner in which speech is delivered. In English, the way something is spoken involves not only pitch changes but also factors such as duration, intensity, and voice quality (John, 1999).

The intonation of the English language is capable of conveying a speaker's emotions and attitudes, such as joy, anger, sorrow, affirmation, negation, delight, surprise, sadness, anger, indifference, and reticence. Therefore, expressing the speaker's emotions and attitudes is the most

common and universal function of English intonation, and it is one of the functions that can be most readily understood by the audience (Vaissière, 2022).

In general, grammatical stress follows the principle of stressing content words and reducing function words (Burzio, 1994). Most native English speakers consider it unnatural if every word is stressed while reading or speaking English (Eisenstein, 1983). More importantly, English learners, if unfamiliar with the weakened forms of these function words, will find it difficult to understand what native speakers say, especially when the speech is delivered at a fast pace (Haynes, 2007).

The original material is derived from the poem "Down By the Salley Gardens" by the poet William Butler Yeats (Yeats, 2000). It depicts a willow garden by a river in Sligo, in the west of Ireland, which serves as a place for young lovers to meet. The poem is imbued with the beauty and tenderness of love, with the final lines subtly expressing a sense of regret. The entire poem consists of declarative sentences, with a falling intonation at the end of most sentences. Rising intonation is used only at certain pauses within sentences and after some nouns to indicate a sense of beauty.

In addition to segmental errors (vowel and consonant mispronunciations), the participant exhibited significant suprasegmental (mainly prosodic) errors, affecting intonation, stress, and rhythm. These errors contribute to unnatural speech patterns, reduced intelligibility, and communication difficulties.

**Table 4. Suprasegmental Error Statistics**

| Example | Standard Pronunciation | Participant's Pronunciation | Error Type |
|---|---|---|---|
| *She bid me take love easy.* | Rising-Falling pattern | Flat or incorrect intonation | Monotonous pitch |
| *She **bid** me take **love** easy.* | Stressed syllables are more prominent | No stress differentiation | Equal stress on all syllables |
| *Down by the Salley gardens.* | Stress-timed rhythm | Each syllable given equal duration | Syllable-timed instead of stress-timed |
| *And on my leaning shoulder she laid her snow-white hand.* | Smooth flow of speech | Hesitation after "and" and "laid" | Unnatural pauses |

The analysis of suprasegmental features in the participant's speech reveals four major pronunciation issues: flat intonation, incorrect stress placement, unnatural rhythm, and inappropriate pausing. These errors significantly affect speech intelligibility, fluency, and overall communication effectiveness.

One of the most prominent issues is flat and monotonous intonation, which makes the speech sound robotic and unnatural. English relies on rising and falling pitch patterns to convey emphasis

and sentence meaning, but the participant failed to apply these variations. As a result, listeners struggle to grasp the intended emotions and focus points of the speech, reducing engagement and comprehension. This issue is likely influenced by the Hanzhonghua accent, which generally exhibits less pitch modulation compared to English.

Another major issue is incorrect stress placement, where the participant pronounced all syllables with equal emphasis, rather than distinguishing between stressed and unstressed syllables. Since English is a stress-timed language, this lack of differentiation weakens the natural rhythm of speech and makes it harder for listeners to identify key words. This issue aligns with findings from previous research on Chinese learners'difficulties with stress timing, particularly among speakers of syllable-timed dialects like Hanzhonghua.

Additionally, the participant's rhythm was inconsistent with English's natural stress patterns. Instead of following a stress-timed rhythm, where stressed syllables are longer and unstressed syllables are reduced, the participant pronounced each syllable with roughly equal duration. This issue contributes to a mechanical, unnatural speech flow, making it difficult for listeners to process the spoken information smoothly.

Finally, inappropriate pausing further disrupts fluency and intelligibility. The participant frequently inserted hesitations in unnatural positions, such as after conjunctions or before key verbs, breaking the natural flow of sentences. These misplaced pauses create confusion for listeners, as they interfere with the logical structure of speech. Research suggests that such pausing patterns may stem from differences in phrasing between Chinese dialects and English, leading to unnatural breaks in speech delivery.

Overall, these suprasegmental errors compound the participant's pronunciation difficulties, making their speech less comprehensible, less engaging, and more difficult to follow. Listeners must exert greater cognitive effort to process the speech, which can lead to misinterpretations or reduced communication efficiency. Without proper stress, rhythm, and intonation, even correctly pronounced words may fail to convey the intended meaning effectively. Addressing these issues through targeted intonation training, stress differentiation drills, and rhythm exercises will be essential in improving the participant's overall English pronunciation and communicative clarity.

## 5. Discussion

This section interprets the findings from the results, comparing them with previous research and discussing their implications. The discussion is organized into three main areas: the influence of segmental errors, the impact and explanations of suprasegmental features, and the overall effects of the Hanzhonghua accent on English pronunciation and communication.

### 5.1. Influence of Segmental Errors on Intelligibility

The phonetic analysis revealed systematic vowel and consonant substitutions, many of which align with the predicted negative transfer effects of Hanzhonghua.

#### 5.1.1. Vowel Substitution and Reduction in Distinctiveness

The most frequent vowel errors included [æ] → [ɪ], [ʌ] → [ɑː], and diphthong simplifications (e.g., /əʊ/ → /uː/). These substitutions are significant because they:

(1) Reduce vowel contrast: English distinguishes between front, central, and back vowels, while Hanzhonghua simplifies some of these distinctions.

(2) Affect word recognition: Mispronunciations like salley (/ˈsæli/) → /ˈsɪli/ and love (/lʌv/) → /lɑːv/ make words harder for listeners to recognize.

These errors align with previous studies on Chinese learners' vowel difficulties (Hao, 2020), where learners struggle with English's larger vowel inventory. Deterding (2006) also noted that many Chinese speakers simplify diphthongs, leading to reduced intelligibility.

### 5.1.2. Consonant Substitution and Loss of Phonemic Contrast

The most problematic consonant errors were [ð] → [d], [w] → [v], and final consonant deletion.

(1) [ð] → [d] and [θ] → [s]: These substitutions align with findings by Wu & Yang (2014), who noted that many Southwestern Mandarin speakers lack dental fricatives in their phonetic inventory.

(2) Final consonant deletion: The omission of /t/ and /d/ weakens English syllable structure, making sentences harder to process.

These consonant shifts greatly impact listener comprehension, as English relies on consonant contrasts to distinguish meaning. Similar patterns have been found in studies on Cantonese speakers (Chan & Li, 2000), reinforcing the role of L1 phonology in pronunciation difficulties.

## 5.2. Explanation of segmental errors in the PAM-L2 framework

To further explain the cognitive mechanisms underlying the negative transfer from Hanzhonghua to English pronunciation, this study adopts the Perceptual Assimilation Model for L2 Learners (PAM-L2) proposed by Best and Tyler (2007). PAM-L2 provides a perceptual account of second language phonological acquisition, suggesting that learners' ability to accurately perceive and produce L2 sounds is largely shaped by how those sounds are categorized in relation to their existing L1 phonological system.

According to PAM-L2, when learners encounter a non-native phoneme, they tend to assimilate it to the closest L1 phoneme. If two L2 sounds are both assimilated to a single L1 category, discrimination between them becomes especially difficult, often resulting in persistent production errors. For instance, the substitution of /æ/ with /ɪ/ observed in the current study is a typical case of Single Category Assimilation. The vowel /æ/ does not exist in Mandarin or Hanzhonghua. Learners, therefore, tend to perceive it as acoustically close to [ɪ] or [ɑː], both of which are present in their L1 inventory. As a result, they misproduce salley /ˈsæli/ as [ˈsɪli], since the perceptual system fails to register /æ/ as a distinct phonemic category.

In contrast, sounds like /ʌ/ are also likely assimilated to a broad, back vowel category, such as [ɑː], leading to errors like love /lʌv/ → [lɑːv]. These perceptual overlaps create cognitive conflicts between the L2 input and the learner's L1 phonological map, resulting in predictable and persistent pronunciation issues.

### 5.3. Impact of Suprasegmental Features on Communication

#### 5.3.1. Monotonous Intonation and Reduced Expressiveness

The participant's flat pitch pattern suggests a lack of natural English intonation, making speech sound robotic. According to Levis (1999), effective communication depends not only on phoneme accuracy but also on intonation cues that signal emphasis, emotion, and sentence type.

(1) English uses intonation to distinguish statements from questions, express emotions, and highlight important words. The participant's failure to vary pitch led to unnatural speech delivery, making it harder for listeners to interpret meaning beyond individual words.

(2) Listener feedback supports this finding, as two participants reported that they initially did not recognize the passage as English.

#### 5.3.2. Lack of Stress-Timed Rhythm

English is a stress-timed language, meaning that stressed syllables occur at roughly equal intervals. In contrast, Hanzhonghua follows a more syllable-timed pattern, where each syllable receives roughly equal emphasis.

(1) The participant did not differentiate between stressed and unstressed syllables, leading to an unnatural rhythm.

(2) This pattern aligns with findings from Duanmu (2007), who noted that many Mandarin speakers struggle with English stress timing.

As a result, even when individual words were pronounced correctly, the unnatural rhythm made the passage difficult to follow.

#### 5.3.3. Slow and Hesitant Speech

The participant's pauses in unnatural places suggest a lack of confidence in pronunciation. This aligns with research on foreign language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986), where pronunciation difficulties contribute to speaking hesitation.

### 5.4. Overall Effects of the Hanzhonghua Accent on English Communication

Based on both quantitative (listener perception) and qualitative (phonetic analysis) data, it is clear that the Hanzhonghua accent significantly impacts English intelligibility and communication. The primary challenges include:

(1) Reduced intelligibility due to vowel and consonant substitutions.

(2) Difficulty in understanding due to a lack of natural stress and rhythm.

(3) Listeners struggling to recognize sentences due to flat intonation.

However, while pronunciation affects communication, it is not the sole determinant of English proficiency. Grammar, vocabulary, and fluency also contribute to effective communication. That being said, pronunciation training can greatly enhance spoken clarity, making it easier for listeners to process speech.

## 6. Countermeasures and Training Strategies

Based on the identified pronunciation issues, this section proposes targeted phonetic training strategies to help Hanzhonghua speakers improve their English pronunciation. The strategies focus on correcting segmental errors (vowel and consonant mispronunciations) and enhancing suprasegmental features (intonation, rhythm, and stress patterns).

### 6.1. Segmental Training (Vowel and Consonant Correction)

#### 6.1.1. Vowel Training

To correct vowel errors such as [æ] → [ɪ] and [ʌ] → [ɑː], the following training methods are recommended:

**(1) Minimal Pair Drills**

Learners practice distinguishing words that differ only in problematic vowels (e.g., bed vs. bad, love vs. lava).

**Example exercise:**

- Instructor: “I will say a word, and you repeat it.”
- Instructor: “Bed.”
- Learner: “Bed.”
- Instructor: “Bad.”
- Learner: “Bad.”

**(2) Phonetic Awareness Training**

- Using IPA charts and visual vowel diagrams to illustrate tongue position and mouth shape.
- Learners observe their mouth movements in a mirror while pronouncing target vowels.

**(3) Listening and Shadowing**

- Students listen to native English speech recordings and repeat sentences immediately after hearing them (shadowing).
- Focus on words containing target vowels (e.g., The cat sat on the mat).

#### 6.1.2. Consonant Training

To correct [ð] → [d], [w] → [v], and final consonant deletion, the following techniques are suggested:

**(1) Consonant Placement Practice**

- Learners place a tongue depressor between their teeth to help produce /ð/ instead of /d/.
- Example: Practicing words like the, this, that with slow, exaggerated pronunciation.

**(2) Word Final Consonant Drills**

- Learners practice holding final consonants by extending the sound duration (e.g., "fieldddd," "standddd").
- Sentences with final consonants are repeated for reinforcement (e.g., I stood in the cold field).

**(3) Interactive Games**

- "Consonant Challenge": Students listen to words with /ð/ and /d/ and must determine which is correct.

### 6.2. Suprasegmental Training (Intonation, Rhythm, and Stress)

#### 6.2.1. Intonation Practice

**(1) Pitch Contour Exercises**

- Learners use intonation diagrams to visualize rising and falling pitch patterns.
- Example: Comparing flat vs. natural intonation in sentences:
- Flat: "She passed the salley gardens with little snow-white feet."
- Natural: "She passed the salley gardens with little snow-white feet?"

**(2) Echo Training**

- Learners repeat native speech recordings with correct intonation patterns.
- Focus on sentences with questions, statements, and emotional expressions.

#### 6.2.2. Stress and Rhythm Training

**(1) Clapping Exercises**

- Learners clap on stressed syllables while reading aloud.
- Example: TA-ble, a-BOUT, be-LIEVE.

**(2) Poetry and Rhyming Activities**

- Learners read poems with clear rhythmic patterns, such as the study passage (Down by the salley gardens).
- Encourages natural stress-timed speech.

#### 6.2.3 Slow-to-Fast Reading

- Learners read slowly at first, exaggerating stress and intonation, then gradually increase speed while maintaining clarity.

### 6.3. Practical Applications and Implementation Plan

#### 6.3.1. Study Plan Overview

**Table 5. A 4-week structured training program**

| Week | Focus | Training Activities |
|---|---|---|
| Week 1 | Vowel Pronunciation | Minimal pairs, vowel charts, listening exercises |
| Week 2 | Consonant Pronunciation | /ð/ training, final consonant drills, tongue placement exercises |
| Week 3 | Intonation and Rhythm | Pitch contour exercises, poetry reading, stress drills |
| Week 4 | Integration and Fluency | Slow-to-fast reading, spontaneous conversation practice |

- Each session should include recordings for self-evaluation, allowing learners to track their progress.
- Teachers should provide real-time corrective feedback and encourage self-monitoring techniques (e.g., recording and listening to one's own speech).

#### 6.3.2. Long-Term Strategies

Beyond short-term training, long-term improvement can be achieved through:

(1) Daily exposure to native speech via audiobooks, podcasts, and movies.

(2) Regular pronunciation practice using speech recognition software (e.g., "Thinkthinker, an English learning software with pronunciation correction, natural spelling and other functions" "BoldVoice, a speech and accent coaching app designed for non-native English learners").

(3) Speaking clubs and peer interactions to enhance fluency and confidence.

### 6.4. Evaluation of Training Effectiveness

While the proposed pronunciation training strategies are grounded in established phonetic pedagogy, their practical value depends on how effectively improvements can be tracked over time. To ensure that training outcomes are measurable, consistent, and applicable, this study recommends the incorporation of clear, structured evaluation methods. These methods will enable educators and learners to monitor progress and adjust instruction based on observable results.

Firstly, pre-training and post-training pronunciation recordings should be implemented. Learners can read the same phonetic passage (e.g., the selected poem) before and after training. These recordings can be analyzed through phonetic transcription and acoustic comparison, focusing on key features such as vowel accuracy, consonant articulation, intonation range, and rhythmic timing (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). Improvements can be quantified using error counts,

intelligibility ratings, or phoneme-level accuracy percentages.

Secondly, listener-based perception tests, similar to those used in this study, can be administered both before and after the training period. A panel of trained and untrained listeners rates the recordings based on comprehensibility, accent strength, and overall fluency using a standardized rubric or Likert scale. This method is widely used in pronunciation studies to capture perceived improvements in intelligibility (Munro & Derwing, 1995). Significant increases in listener comprehension and reductions in perceived accent interference would indicate training success.

Third, educators can integrate acoustic analysis software, such as Praat, to measure objective acoustic features—including pitch range, syllable duration, vowel formants, and pause placement (Boersma & Weenink, 2023). For instance, an increased range of intonation or a more appropriate stress-timed rhythm can signal suprasegmental improvement (Levis, 2005).

Finally, learners should complete self-monitoring checklists and reflection logs throughout the training period. Encouraging learners to set individual pronunciation goals and track their progress fosters learner autonomy and metacognitive awareness (Wenden, 1998). Teachers can provide guided reflection prompts such as: “Which sounds did you struggle with today?” or “What feedback did you receive on your intonation?”

In summary, combining pre/post recordings, perception ratings, acoustic analysis, and learner reflection offers a reliable and comprehensive framework for evaluating pronunciation training outcomes. Embedding such tools into instruction provides both instructors and learners with tangible evidence of improvement, supporting more focused and effective pronunciation teaching.

## 7. Conclusion

### 7.1. Summary of Findings

This study explored the negative transfer effects of the Hanzhonghua accent on English pronunciation, analyzing both segmental (vowel/consonant) and suprasegmental (intonation, rhythm) issues.

**Key findings include:**

(1) Vowel errors: Mispronunciations such as [æ] → [ɪ] and [ʌ] → [ɑː] reduce intelligibility.

(2) Consonant substitutions: [ð] → [d], [w] → [v], and final consonant deletion weaken speech clarity.

(3) Suprasegmental issues: Flat intonation and unnatural rhythm disrupt fluent communication.

(4) Perception test results: Listeners understood only 43.57% of the passage, highlighting the impact of accent interference on comprehensibility.

### 7.2. Implications for English Language Teaching

The findings emphasize the need for dialect-sensitive pronunciation training in English language education. Teachers should:

(1) Incorporate phonetic drills tailored to common regional pronunciation errors.

(2) Use stress and intonation exercises to improve natural speech flow.

(3) Encourage interactive speaking activities for real-world practice.

### 7.3. Limitations and Future Research

The study offers valuable insights but has limitations. The sample size was small, with only one participant analyzed, so future research should include more speakers for better generalizability. The perception tests had subjective elements, as listener judgments may vary, suggesting that objective speech recognition tools could improve reliability. Additionally, there was a lack of long-term intervention assessment, so further research should evaluate the effectiveness of pronunciation training over time.

Future studies could also explore several other areas. The impact of Hanzhonghua accent training on speaking confidence could be investigated. The role of phonetic technology, such as AI speech recognition, in improving pronunciation could be examined. Furthermore, comparisons with other Chinese dialects could help develop broader pronunciation teaching frameworks.

### 7.4. Conclusion

This study confirms that the Hanzhonghua accent poses significant challenges for English learners, affecting intelligibility and communication. However, with targeted pronunciation training, learners can improve their accuracy and fluency.

By integrating segmental correction techniques, suprasegmental training, and long-term pronunciation strategies, English educators can help dialect speakers develop clearer, more natural pronunciation, ultimately enhancing their communication skills in global contexts.

**Author Contributions:**

Conceptualization, Y. Z.; methodology, Y. Z.; software, Y. Z.; validation, Y. Z.; formal analysis, Y. Z.; investigation, Y. Z.; resources, Y. Z.; data curation, Y. Z.; writing—original draft preparation, Y. Z.; writing—review and editing, Y. Z.; visualization, Y. Z.; supervision, Y. Z.; project administration, Y. Z.; funding acquisition, Y. Z. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:**

This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:**

Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:**

Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:**

Not applicable.

**Acknowledgments:**

I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Wang Hongyan at College of International Studies, Shenzhen University who encourages me to conduct this research. In addition, I would like to thank all the volunteers who participated in this experiment for their hard work.

**Conflict of Interest:**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**References**

Allen, V. F. (1971). Teaching Intonation, from Theory to Practice. TESOL Quarterly, 5(1), 73.

Best, C. T., & Tyler, M. D. (2007). Nonnative and second-language speech perception. Language Experience in Second Language Speech Learning, 13-34.

Boersma, P., & Weenink, D. (2023). Praat: Doing phonetics by computer (Version 6.4.02) [Computer software]. http://www.praat.org

Burzio, L. (1994). Principles of English stress. Cambridge University Press.

Celce-Murcia, M., Brinton, D. M., & Goodwin, J. M. (2010). Teaching pronunciation: A course book and reference guide (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Chan, A. Y. W., & Li, D. C. S. (2000). English and Cantonese Phonology in Contrast: Explaining Cantonese ESL Learners' English Pronunciation Problems. Language, Culture and Curriculum, 13(1), 67-85.

Deterding, D. (2006). The pronunciation of English by speakers from China. English World-Wide, 27(2), 175-198.

Duanmu, S. (2007). The phonology of standard Chinese (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Duff, P. A. (2008). Case study research in applied linguistics. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Eisenstein, M. (1983). Native Reactions to Non-Native Speech: A Review of Empirical Research. Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 5(2), 160-176.

Gilbert, J. B. (2008). Teaching pronunciation: Using the prosody pyramid. Cambridge University Press.

Hao, Y. C. (2020). Second language acquisition of Mandarin Chinese tones by English speakers: A study of production and perception. Journal of Phonetics, 78, 100923.

Haynes, J. (2007). Getting started with English language learners : how educators can meet the challenge. Association For Supervision And Curriculum Development.

Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. The Modern Language Journal, 70(2), 125-132.

Huang, X. (2023). The Influence of Chinese Dialect on English Pronunciation Acquisition: Evidence from Liaoning Accent as An Example. Communications in Humanities Research, 3(1), 250-256.

Lado, R. (1957). Linguistics across cultures: Applied linguistics for language teachers. University of Michigan Press.

Levis, J. M. (1999). Intonation in theory and practice, revisited. TESOL Quarterly, 33(1), 37-63.

Levis, J. M. (2005). Changing contexts and shifting paradigms in pronunciation teaching. TESOL Quarterly, 39(3), 369-377.

Mackey, A., & Gass, S. M. (2016). Second language research: Methodology and design (2nd ed.). Routledge.

McKay, S. L. (2006). Researching second language classrooms. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Munro, M. J., & Derwing, T. M. (1995). Foreign accent, comprehensibility, and intelligibility in the speech of second language learners. Language Learning, 45(1), 73-97.

Murphy, J. M. (2017). Intonation and discourse in second language pronunciation instruction. In O. Kang, R. Thomson, & J. Murphy (Eds.), The Routledge handbook of contemporary English pronunciation (pp. 249–263). Routledge.

Odlin, T. (1989). Language transfer: Cross-linguistic influence in language learning. Cambridge University Press.

Vaissière, J. (2022). Perception of Intonation. Hal.science, 236-263.

Wenden, A. (1998). Learner strategies for learner autonomy: Planning and implementing learner training for language learners. Prentice Hall.

William Butler Yeats. (1888). Old Song Resung.

Wu, D. K., & Yang, J. (2014). Hanzhong fangyan dui Yingyu xuexi de fuqianyi yingxiang ji duice [Negative transfer effects of the Hanzhong dialect on English learning and countermeasures]. Journal of Ankang University, 26(5), 15-20.

Yeats, W. (2000). Selected Poems. Penguin UK.

Yin, R. K. (2018). Case study research and applications: Design and methods (6th ed.). Sage Publications.

Journal of Literature & Language, 2025, 1(1), 36-49
https://doi.org/10.71204/j1dk9x62

# Based on the Perspective of Feminist Theory, the Research on the Image of Women in Yu Hua's Novels

**Xianfei Ke**[1, *]

[1] Mogilev State University, Mogilev 212000, Belarus

***Correspondence:**
Xianfei Ke

3140659432@qq.com

*Received: 28 March 2025 /Accepted: 25 April 2025 /Published online: 2 May 2025*

**Abstract**

Since the 80s of the 20th century, Yu Hua has always maintained a strong creative enthusiasm, and has produced a series of well-known masterpieces, which occupy a pivotal position in the contemporary literary world. For a long time, the academic research on Yu Hua's creation has never stopped, however, compared with the in-depth exploration of other aspects such as his creative style, narrative skills, and thematic expression, the female image in Yu Hua's works has not received the wide attention it deserves.In Yu Hua's novels, he has created many female characters with different personalities, who either show their simple and kind nature, or reveal evil and lascivious qualities. These female images are not only an important part of Yu Hua's literary creation, but also reflect his concern and deep thinking about women. The in-depth analysis of these female images is of great academic significance and research value for us to understand the process of loss and reconstruction of female subjectivity in Yu Hua's works. This paper takes the female image portrayed in Yu Hua's novels as the research object, starts from the perspective of feminism, and uses feminist theory as an analytical framework to carry out a systematic and in-depth study of the female image in Yu Hua's works. Specifically, this paper will classify and sort out the female images in Yu Hua's novels, comprehensively present the various dilemmas faced by women in Yu Hua's novels from a feminist perspective, and deeply discuss the enlightenment and significance of the portrayal of women in Yu Hua's novels.

**Keywords:** Yu Hua; Female Figures; Feminist Theory; Written By Women

## 1. Research Background And Research Significance

### 1.1. Background

Yu Hua is undoubtedly a highly influential writer in the contemporary Chinese literary scene. In recent years, the academic research on the avant-garde writers of the 20th century has continued to expand and deepen, and as an iconic writer of the avant-garde period, Yu Hua's works have naturally become the focus of academic research, triggering a large number of far-

reaching studies from various dimensions. His works have not only undergone detailed analysis from multiple angles and levels, but also spawned many research results with both depth and breadth at multiple levels. In these rich studies, the female characters in Yu Hua's novels have gradually become a literary phenomenon that cannot be ignored (Zhang, 2009). In Yu Hua's carefully constructed novel world, the female figure is not a simple foil or symbol, but a three-dimensional character with rich emotions, complex personalities and diverse destinies. They play multiple roles in the long river of family, society and even history, and constantly face a variety of challenges and dilemmas. With delicate brushstrokes, Yu Hua delves into the inner world and external environment of these female figures, which not only shows their unique personality charm, but also reflects his keen insight and deep thinking about the fate of women and social reality (Zhu, 2022).

In recent years, the female characters in Yu Hua's novels have also attracted the attention of some researchers. However, the current research on the female image in Yu Hua's works mainly focuses on the interpretation through systematic classification. Although this research approach helps us understand the diversity of female images in Yu Hua's novels, there is still a lot of room for expansion in the depth and breadth of research (Zhang, 2012). From the perspective of feminist theoretical criticism, a more in-depth and comprehensive study of the female image in Yu Hua's novels is undoubtedly an important direction with great exploration value and is expected to promote the deepening of the study of Yu Hua's novels.

### 1.2. Research Implications

The use of feminist theoretical criticism to analyze the female image in Yu Hua's novels is of significant research significance, which can fill the gap in the field of female image research in Yu Hua's works in the current academic circles. At present, although Yu Hua's works have attracted much attention, there is a relative lack of systematic and in-depth research on the female images in her novels, especially the detailed analysis from the perspective of feminism. Feminist theoretical criticism, as a unique method of criticism, focuses on revealing the gender power relations in literary works and the living conditions of women in the social and cultural context. Introducing this theory into the study of Yu Hua's novels will help us to capture the complexity and multifaceted nature of the female characters in the works with a more keen insight, and explore the mechanism of gender power and the logic of discourse construction hidden in the depths of the novel text.

Through the in-depth analysis of the female image in Yu Hua's novels, we can reveal the dilemma of female survival contained in it, and accurately interpret the profound connotation of Yu Hua's female image shaping. At the same time, from another dimension, feminist theoretical criticism provides us with a new perspective and method for interpreting Yu Hua's novels, so that we can understand the themes and meanings of her works more comprehensively. This is not only a further in-depth interpretation of Yu Hua's novels, but also a beneficial deepening and expansion of the field of literary criticism. With the help of feminist theoretical criticism, we can more comprehensively understand the female images in Yu Hua's works, as well as the interdependence between them and the male images in her works, as well as the social environment and culture. In this way, we can dig deeper into the social significance of Yu Hua's

novels, further broaden the horizon of modern and contemporary literary studies, and inject new vitality and ideas into the field of literary studies.

## 2. The female writing of Yu Hua's novels in the 80s of the 20th century

Novels often use characters to reflect social life, and readers interpret the author's emotional tendencies when creating by gaining insight into the value implications of the characters in the novel. However, in the creation of novels in the 80s of the 20th century, Yu Hua broke the convention, severed the close connection between the signifier and the signified, and dissolved the deep connotation of the character.

In Yu Hua's creative concept, characters are nothing more than "props" of narrative, and the core of their value lies in revealing the essential desires of human beings and interpreting the subjective world of human existence. Based on this creative concept, the characters in Yu Hua's novels in the 80s of the 20th century have transcended the traditional boundaries between men and women. They are no longer independent individuals with distinct personality traits and emotional contexts, but become narrative codes, assisting the author in constructing a unique way of cognition that deviates from conventional experience. These characters work hand in hand with the author to create a mysterious and confusing symbolic world, allowing readers to feel a different kind of literary charm and ideological impact in the exploration.

### 2.1. Intentionality and Symbolism

#### 2.1.1. Crazy Narrative, Deconstruction of the Existential Dilemma Under the Irrational Mirror

In Yu Hua's literary atlas, the image of madness constitutes a unique set of existential fables (Zhao, 2018). Taking "Mistake by the River" as a typical text, the writer completes the profound deconstruction of the rational order through the mirror reflection of the double crazy subject. The insane no longer exists here as a mere pathological symbol, but is alienated into a prism that reflects the folds of human nature, reflecting the spiritual dilemma under the discipline mechanism of civilization. The image of the madman in the novel has a strong symbolic meaning. Yu Hua deliberately placed him in the position of an aphasia, constructing a picture of madness through the gaze mechanism of the surrounding spectators. When the four mothers-in-law and the madman appear in the market hand in hand, the discursive violence formed by the laughter of the people forms a circular prison, imprisoning the two in the chain of signifiers of madness. It is worth noting that after the fourth mother-in-law imitated the madness, the viewing structure underwent a subtle reversal: the onlookers, who were originally witnesses of the madness, became the conspirators of the madness fact at the moment when the madness performance was deconstructed by the subject. This displacement of the subject and the other exposes the fearful nature of the rational world for heterogeneous existence.

The madness of the fourth mother-in-law is more existential and tragic. As a martyr of feudal ethics, she had already completed spiritual self-destruction during her forty-eight years of festival-keeping career. The intrusion of the madman is in essence a subconscious ritual of conjuring the

vitality of life: its violence is interpreted as the repetition of the husband, and the pain of the bite of the breast becomes an alternative inscription of the arch of chastity. When the fourth mother-in-law repeatedly performed the masochistic scene in the confined space, the physical pain was transformed into a strange pleasure of moral confirmation, completing the sacrificial sacrifice of the three obedience and four virtues. This tendency to self-destruct is, as Foucault put it, a performance of self-monitoring after the internalization of the discipline of power.

The narrative of violence in the text presents a double paradox. The violence of the madman against the fourth mother-in-law is not only a concrete presentation of irrational violence, but also a metaphorical projection of the violent structure of rational order. The satisfaction obtained by the four mothers-in-law in the abuse reveals how the discipline society completes moral reproduction by creating painful subjects. This dialectic of violence culminates in the intimate scene of the closed door: the closure of the space becomes the curtain of the moral theater, and the physical injury is transformed into the sacrificial ritual of the ethical order.

The kingdom of reason that Yu Hua constructs here is actually a heterogeneous space in the sense of Bataille. When the police extrapolated the madman, the enforcer was reduced to the paternal Oedipus; When the villagers collectively expel the madness, the spectators are the deformed beings to be watched. This dialectical reversal of rationality and irrationality exposes the absurdity of self-referential nature in civilized society. Insanity is no longer a case of pathology, but a blade for deconstructing the myth of reason, drawing a bloody trajectory across the existential wasteland. Through this kind of crazy writing, Yu Hua completes an allegorical critique of the predicament of modernity. When the rational world asserts its purity with violence, its inherent insane genes are exposed. The mirror relationship between the madman and the fourth mother-in-law is just like the split subject in Lacan's mirror stage, falling into an eternal cycle of alienation in self-validation. This narrative strategy not only deepens the existential dimension of the text, but also reconstructs the possibility of literature's exploration of the dilemma of human nature in the process of deconstruction.

### 2.1.2. Silly Narratives, Violent Allegory and Existential Dilemma

As Yu Hua's transformation from the time of self-training, "Traveling Far Away at the Age of Eighteen" deconstructs the traditional paradigm of coming-of-age narrative with its exquisite violent allegory (Xiong, 2017). The teenager embarks on a journey with Enlightenment innocence, and his metaphor for finding a hotel points to an existential dilemma. When the paradoxical scene of the driver taking the cigarette and refusing to carry it appears, the symbolic system of order begins to disintegrate: the exchange ethic that the teenager adheres to seems absurd in the face of real violence. The driver's goodwill to buy with an apple and the subsequent atrocity of participating in the robbery constitute an existential double deception, exposing the paradoxical symbiosis of good and evil in human nature.

The Apple heckling incident serves as a key turning point, pushing the narrative into the abyss of absurdity. The villagers' numbness to robbery and the driver's appreciation of violence weave together into a spectacle of violent aesthetics. The tragic gesture of the teenager blocking the robbery with his body is reduced to a burlesque performance in the indifferent gaze of the driver's

walk, and this violent viewing mechanism is just like a modern variation of Sartre's other that is hell. When a teenager tries to awaken his conscience with language but encounters existential aphasia, Camus's absurd fate of Sisyphus receives contemporary resonance.

In Noon with the Northwest Wind Howling, the allegory of violence evolves into a more radical theater of the absurd. The protagonist is forcibly programmed into a stranger's mourning ceremony, and the extreme scene of the funeral becomes an experimental field for deconstructing subjectivity. The community of lies collectively constructed by the participants completes the forced rewriting of individual identities through ritual violence. The protagonist's psychological transformation from resistance to compromise reflects the subjective production mechanism in Foucault's disciplined society: when violence permeates daily life in the form of cultural practices, resistance itself becomes an absurd footnote. The recurring dislocation of imagery in both works constitutes an intertextual dialogue: the former is the disorientation of physical space, the latter is the dislocation of social identity. The hotel chased by the teenager on the highway and the self that the protagonist seeks at the funeral point together to the habitat crisis in the dilemma of modernity.

### 2.2. The Paradox of Women's Existence Breaks Through

#### 2.2.1. Subjective Interrogation in the Context of Absurdity

With his cold brushstrokes, Yu Hua outlines the dual dilemma of women's survival in the wasteland of existentialism. His female figures are often thrown into the web of existence woven by the absurd, deducing the paradox of existence between the rational and the irrational. This writing strategy goes beyond the surface of gender narratives and directly addresses the common existential dilemma of modern people—when the world fades from the veil of warmth and reveals the irrational rock nature of Camus's pen, women, as more sensitive subjects of existence, take the lead in touching the unbearable lightness of life.

In Jiazhen in "Alive", Xu Yulan in "Xu Sanguan Selling Blood" and other characters, Yu Hua constructed a mirror theater of female survival. In the whirlpool of suffering, they are both objects to be gazed at and subjects of self-redemption (Jia, 2015). Jiazhen swallowed all the bitter fruits handed by fate with amazing tenacity, but in the process of swallowing, she completed the questioning of the essence of existence; Xu Yulan adheres to her meager dignity in the spittle of the world, and uses the wisdom of the market to deconstruct the moral shackles of the disciplined society. The struggle of these female figures in absurd situations is like Kafka's hunger artist's ultimate inquiry into the meaning of existence (Ren, 2022).

Yu Hua tears the curtain of the truth of existence through the perspective of women, exposing the moral ulcers of the rational order. In "Reality One", women, as witnesses and bearers of the violent landscape, have their bodies as the sacrificial ground of power discipline; And Li Lan in "Brothers" interprets the rootless drift of individual fate in the torrent of the times. These narrative experiments prove that women sink deeper into the fog of existentialism when they try to escape the prison of the absurd—they are both victims and conspirators of this absurdity.

This existential paradox forms a polyphonic dialogue structure in the text, and Yu Hua allows the female characters to burst out with amazing survival energy in the midst of suffering, which is both a rebellion against the absurd and a surrender to the absurd (Wang, 2021). Just as Jiazhen is obsessed with staying alive after countless life and death farewells, Yu Hua's women use their bloody palm prints to engrave Camus-esque defiance inscriptions on the desert of existence: admit the absurd, but not succumb to the absurd. This narrative strategy not only deconstructs the trappings of traditional gender narratives, but also reconstructs the possibility of literature's exploration of the essence of life in the existential dimension.

### 2.2.2. The Labyrinth of Contingency: An Existential Absurd Narrative Deconstruction

From the perspective of existentialist philosophy, Yu Hua's early works construct an absurd labyrinth based on chance. Sartre defined the absurd as the inevitable presentation of contingency, while Yu Hua transformed this philosophical speculation into a thrilling literary picture through narrative experiments. The serendipity in his pen is by no means the plot material in the traditional narrative, but exists as an ontology, becoming a sharp blade for deconstructing the rational order.

The road adventure in "Eighteen Years Old" can be called an absurd variation of the existential coming-of-age ceremony. The violent robbery and betrayal of the driver encountered by the teenager are actually the accidental violent disenchantment of the world. When the apple is transformed as a symbol from a gift to a violent medium, the cognitive ritual completed by the teenager with blood, just like Camus's Sisyphus pushing a stone up a mountain, confirms the reality of existence in the absurd. This accidental violence tears through the veil of beauty of the coming-of-age narrative and exposes the irrational nature of the world. "Noon with the Northwest Wind Howling" deduces serendipity into a collective absurd carnival. The absurd scene of the protagonist being forcibly programmed into a stranger's funeral is in essence an extreme interpretation of the existential abandoned state. The funeral, a highly ritualized space, is transformed into a violent device that deconstructs subjectivity. When I complete the identification of my godson amid the cries of strangers, the absurdity of Kafkaesque metamorphosis is translated here with black humor—the individual is reduced to a puppet of symbols in the vortex of chance, and any resistance is destined to become a footnote to the absurd. The atlas of family slaughter in "A Kind of Reality" sublimates chance into a narrative allegory of fatalism. Pippi's accidental death of his cousin by mistake triggers a domino-like chain of revenge. In the blood-colored theater that Yu Hua constructs here, each perpetrator is an accidental marionette, and each death scene becomes a brutal footnote to the existential dilemma. When violence is presented in the form of aesthetics, the sense of absurdity penetrates the surface of the text, pointing directly to the nihilistic nature of modern human existence.

Together, these narrative experiments confirm Yu Hua's insight into the truth of existence: chance is the greatest force in deconstructing order (Liu, 2012). In the avant-garde period, Yu Hua dissolves the causal logic of traditional novels through accidental narratives, throwing characters into an existential vacuum. This narrative strategy not only subverts the reflection theory of realism, but also reconstructs the exploration dimension of literature's existential

dilemma at the philosophical level—when the world fades away from the camouflage of reason and reveals its absurd nature, people can only touch the true temperature of existence in the labyrinth of chance (Feng, 2012).

Yu Hua dissects the historical fabric with his cold blade, and constructs a narrative labyrinth with contingency as the warp and weft on the existential wasteland. The trajectory of his individual life is actually a never-ending roulette wheel of desire in the theater of the absurd, where every turn of fate is wrapped in the dice of fate, casting the shadow of disaster in the folds of history (Wang, 2024). This narrative strategy goes beyond the figurative portrayal of characters and completes the ultimate interrogation of the nature of existence in the philosophical dimension. In the long narrative of "Alive", Fugui's life is just like duckweed that has been manipulated by chance. From the fall of the identity of the son of a gentleman to the old tenant farmer, from the desertion on the battlefield to the death of relatives one after another, every fate node is full of accidental cracks. Yu Hua weaves individual suffering into the warp and weft of the times with almost cruel restraint, and when Fugui talks to Lao Niu in the sunset, the absurdity of existentialism penetrates the surface of the text—the individual in the torrent of history is nothing more than dust crushed under the giant wheel of chance. "Xu Sanguan Selling Blood" pushes the narrative of desire to the extreme of absurdity. Xu Sanguan's life trajectory of selling blood twelve times is actually a confrontation map between the desire to survive and the absurd reality. When the sale of blood is alienated from an emergency means to a survival ritual, and when the ethics of blood is deconstructed by commodity logic, Yu Hua deconstructs the traditional ethical narrative with black humor. This variation of suffering driven by desire is just like Sartre's cruel interpretation of existence before essence: in the web of desire woven by chance, man is both a thrown being and a self-shaped subject. To Lin Xiangfu in "Wencheng", Yu Hua pushes the accidental narrative to the epic dimension. The protagonist's obsession with pursuing Wencheng is actually a modern metonym of the existential myth of Sisyphus. When the search becomes an end in itself, when reality dissolves into symbols in obsession, Lin Xiangfu's fate trajectory is consistent with Faulkner's pursuit of Quentin.

## 3. The Image of Women Who are Objectified and Oppressed

Since patriarchy replaced matriarchal civilization as the dominant structure of human society, the male-centered cultural order has completed the systematic marginalization of women through institutional discipline and symbolic symbols in the long history of thousands of years. This deep-rooted paradigm of gender power not only relegates women to inferior existences, but also imprisons them in a subordinate position with cultural coercion — they are objectified as reproductive tools for inheritance in the patriarchal ethical framework, deprived of the right to speak in the public sphere and reduced to voicelessness, and often appear as stared at objectified images in literary narratives. Yu Hua's literary creation is like a cold prism, reflecting the multiple folds of women's existence in the shadow of patriarchal civilization: they are either reduced to victims on the family altar, or shattered into objects of desire in the mirror image of male desire, and more often as absentees erased by historical narratives, struggling between survival and

dignity. This collective aphasia of fate, under the writer's pen full of existential questioning, turns into a profound interrogation of the alienation of human nature and the chronic diseases of civilization.

### 3.1. Loss of Female Status

From the perspective of the construction of gender order, patriarchy weaves a tight network of social control through the coupling of institutional power distribution and symbolic system. In this civilizational code with the male body as the original paradigm, women are systematically deprived of the discourse subjectivity—their voices are either completely swallowed up by the silencer mechanism or distorted and alienated within the male-dominated interpretive framework. This structural aphasia does not stem from the lack of vocal channels in physical space, but from the rejection of women's cognitive authority by the entire civilization system: even when women make a voice, it is often suspended as an irrational expression of emotion or a deviation that needs to be disciplined.

The process of patriarchal culture using discipline technology to objectify women shows the operation mechanism of life power as Foucault said. Through the multiple writings of religious texts, ethical codes, and educational systems, women are forcibly referred to as congenitally weak secondary sexual beings. This symbolic violence not only deprives them of their rights and dignity as independent subjects, but also internalizes them as a paradigm of women's self-perception through intergenerational transmission. When the ethical dogma of the husband and wife ("Rites and Mourning Clothes") binds female values to the male will, and when the precepts of the three obediences and four virtues divide the female life course into three stages of patriarchal transfer, the female subject completes the spiritual taming of self-objectification in this symbolic order (Dai, 2023).

As the core strategy of patriarchal space politics, the spatial segregation system has reached its ultimate in the precept of "The Book of Rites: Internal Rules" in which men are not allowed to enter and women are not out. This gender division not only constructs a binary opposition between the public and private spheres, but also completes the castration of women's sociality through the confinement of physical space. When women are imprisoned in the closed field of food, clothing, and ceremonies, their cognitive schema gradually shrinks into a tool for maintaining family relationships, and the historical possibility of participating in the process of social civilization is completely erased. This kind of spatial violence forms a vicious circle with the unspoken admonition of women in "Etiquette", which excludes the experience of female subjects from the narrative of civilization and creates the absentees in the history that Beauvoir said.

It is worth noting that the violent nature of the patriarchal system is precisely reflected in its civilized disguise. When traditional norms package female slavery with a sense of ethical sublime service to heaven, and when spatial isolation is glorified as a harmonious order arrangement of yin and yang, gender oppression acquires a naturalized ideological package. This kind of cultural coercion not only shapes the submissive gender role, but also makes future generations of women

unconsciously inherit the identity of the oppressed through the inheritance of collective memory, and complete the instrumental imagination of themselves at the unconscious level of civilization.

### 3.2. The Multiple Folds of Women's Living Conditions Under the Patriarchal Order

In Yu Hua's literary narratives, the portrayal of female characters often presents deep symptoms encoded by patriarchal culture. Those seemingly tame dependent personalities are actually the product of symbolic violence against female subjects by the male gaze. When the text projects virtues that conform to patriarchal aesthetic expectations, such as virtue and chastity, onto female characters, this gaze mechanism quietly erases the complex spectrum of women's life experience, reducing it to an empty signifier that carries male desire and moral imagination. Feminist theory reveals that this discipline is far from a mere discursive practice, but a cultural violence that permeates physical, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, and that Foucault's so-called power to life shows a particularly gloomy face in the gender order.

Patriarchal discipline imprisons the female subject in the ethical cage of a good wife and mother through the precise arrangement of symbolic order. Yu Hua's female characters are like butterflies nailed to the stakes of symbolic boundaries by the gaze of Lacan's Great Other, and their existential value is forcibly exchanged for symbolic capital that serves the confirmation of male subjects. In Jiazhen in "Alive", we witness how this discipline completes the chronic deprivation of women's vitality in the name of dedication; The fate of Xu Yulan in "Xu Sanguan Selling Blood" exposes the pathological control of patriarchy over women's bodies and reputations (Suo, 2024). The female characters in these texts, even if they occasionally flash the spark of resistance, will eventually be dragged back to the established track by narrative gravity, becoming a tragic footnote that confirms the predicament of male existence.

It is worth noting that Yu Hua's narrative strategy is often dehistoricized, so that the plight of women is presented as an eternal dilemma that transcends specific time and space. While this artistic choice enhances the philosophical tension of the text, it also inadvertently reinforces the natural illusion of the gender order. When female characters are encoded as the natural bearers of suffering, their subjectivity is quietly dissolved in the collective unconscious empathy. The complicity of this narrative mechanism with patriarchal culture's objectification of women as moral containers constitutes an underlying gender political paradox in Yu Hua's work—avant-garde narratives that attempt to deconstruct the truth of existence inadvertently replicate the cultural codes that suppress women.

### 3.3. The Inner Cage of Spiritual Domestication

In Yu Hua's narrative universe, the landscape of female discipline presents a palpitating polyphony—not only the top-down violent weaving of the patriarchal system, but also the virulent inheritance of intergenerational transmission within the female genealogy. When the feudal elders castrated young women in the name of women's morality, this discipline had long gone beyond simple ethical discipline and became what Foucault called the dark practice of self-technology: by internalizing the patriarchal law, older women alienated themselves into the precision cogs of the discipline machine, completing the eternal reproduction of the oppressive order in the change of generations.

The image of Jiazhen's mother-in-law in "Alive" can be called a classic metaphor for this alienation of the subject. With the survival wisdom of her daughter-in-law for many years, she transformed the discipline experience she suffered when she was young into a new tool of oppression, and implemented intensified mental control on her daughter-in-law. The paradox of this role reversal exposes the deepest conspiracy of patriarchy, which makes the oppressor the greatest victim at the same time through the intergenerational transmission of gender identity, completing the eternal presence of the cycle of violence under the double mask of victim-perpetrator (Wang, 2023). Feminist theory reveals that the duality of this discipline is in fact a brutal reality version of Butler's theory of gender manipulation. In the process of repeatedly playing the role of a good daughter, a good wife and a good mother, the female subject gradually internalizes the external norm into the latent ideology of self-regulation. When Xu Yulan ("Xu Sanguan Selling Blood") anchors the value of survival to the attributes of the reproductive tool of inheritance, and when Li Lan in "Brothers" is domesticated into a silent victim under the shadow of her husband's power, this internalized discipline mechanism has quietly completed the qualitative change from the discipline of others to self-colonization (Zhang, 2023).

The most secret tentacles of the discipline power lie in the subjective illusion it creates. Those alienated mothers-in-law, when wielding the scepter of patriarchy, can get a certain twisted pleasure of authority, which is essentially a gendered interpretation of Stockholm syndrome. In the mirror game of intergenerational oppression, they are both subservients to the patriarchal order and their unconscious complicity. Yu Hua's cold brushstrokes just tore apart the civilized façade of this discipline mechanism. His group portraits of women are not only the bearers of suffering, but also the transmitters of violence, interpreting the most thrilling gender allegory of patriarchal society in the double strangulation of existential dilemma and spiritual alienation. This narrative strategy makes the text a prism through which to see the ills of civilization: when women internalize patriarchal discipline as the cornerstone of their self-identity, they are no longer simply second sexuals, but become the anonymous cornerstones that underpin the entire gender order.

## 4. The Unique Value and Reflection of Yu Hua's Women's Writing from the Perspective of Feminism

### 4.1. The Unique Value of Women's Writing in Yu Hua's Novels

When it comes to Yu Hua, avant-garde literature is undoubtedly a core issue that cannot be bypassed. Together with writers such as Su Tong, Ma Yuan, and Ge Fei, Yu Hua emerged in the literary world in the wave of avant-garde literature with a pioneering attitude, and became a very representative pioneer of this period.

The term "vanguard", which has its origins in the Western military field, was originally used to refer to the elite troops in the front line of the military, and then the concept gradually permeated the field of sociology. By the middle of the 19th century, the "avant-garde" officially stepped into the field of literature, and those novels with the spirit of pioneers and the courage to break through the tradition were named "avant-garde novels".The name. In the 80s of the last century,

avant-garde novels began to enter the public eye, and the works of this period, with their breakthroughs in the old literary norms and innovative explorations of language and form, broke the single mode of literature serving politics for a long time, occupied a place in the literary genre of the new period, and added a unique and brilliant color to the modern Chinese literary scene. Character image is one of the core elements of the novel, and in the portrayal of women, avant-garde writers show diverse stylistic differences. Yu Hua's portrayal of women is different from male writers such as Su Tong and Ge Fei, who are good at delicately depicting women's psychology and emotions, and his creative style also presents distinct stage characteristics.

### 4.2. Reflections on Women's Writing in Yu Hua's Novels

Through an in-depth analysis of the female image created by male writers, we can gain insight into the gender concept and cultural mentality of male writers behind it. However, because it is often difficult for male writers to break free from the inherent limitations of their own gender in the process of creative practice, they may not be able to truly touch the inner logic and deep inner world of women's lives. Therefore, male writers may encounter certain difficulties in accurately expressing the true state of women's lives and profoundly revealing women's desires for life. This dilemma leads them to often indulge more in their own imagination and intoxication in the process of narration, and it is difficult to fully and truly present the life and spiritual picture of women.

Since the transition of human society from a matrilineal clan society to a patriarchal society, men have gradually established a dominant position in the social structure. With the birth of writing and the continuous evolution of human civilization, this strong position of men has been further consolidated and strengthened. As a result of this historical process, women have been gradually marginalized in all aspects of social life, and even forgotten in the subtle corners of history.

In our country, although since the 50s of the twentieth century, the state policy has established in a mandatory way "equality between men and women, equal pay for equal work".But women's emancipation in the true sense does not depend solely on these externally granted rights and status. The real symbol of women's emancipation lies in the awakening of women's self-consciousness, the sublimation of the spirit of subjectivity, and the realization and confirmation of self-worth. At present, although women's social status and economic rights have been guaranteed to a certain extent, male culture still occupies a mainstream position in the social and cultural field. Based on the over-inflated male self-gender position, men's gender imagination and expectations of women are often inevitably biased and misunderstood. This kind of imagination and expectation is actually constructing a false image of women, which in turn reinforces the dominance of the male-centric discourse system and the narrative mode of male hegemony. This phenomenon profoundly reflects the unconscious continuation and inheritance of the traditional concept of male power by male writers in the creative process.

## 5. Conclusion

In Yu Hua's labyrinth of literary narratives, the existential circumstances of female characters constitute a hidden incision in the deconstruction of patriarchal discourse. The female figures encoded as the second sex are in fact the tragic reflections of Lacan's mirror stage—when the eponymous heroine in "The Girl Willows" is stripped of all her individual attributes and reduced to a blank screen projected by male desire, this symbolic violence has gone beyond simple characterization and has become a narrative ruse that supports the confirmation of the male subject. Yu Hua's brushstrokes reveal the absurdity of existentialism here: the more empty the female character, the more it can reflect the illusion of male subjectivity.

Foucault's theory of self-technique provides a pathological perspective for understanding the internalizing mechanisms of this discipline. From Jiazhen's engraving of women's virtue as a life emblem in "Alive" to Xu Yulan's exchange of fertility value for survival chips in "Xu Sanguan Selling Blood", the female character's tame acceptance of patriarchal norms is actually a perfect practice of the microscopic physics of power. The horror of this discipline lies in the fact that it implants cultural genes through intergenerational transmission – when young women complete the spiritual patricide between their grandmother's footwrap and their mother's chastity archway, they have long regarded the iron-cast ethical shackles as a natural attribute of life. Beauvoir's theory of the Other acquires a brutal embodiment in Yu Hua's texts. The glorified good wives and mothers are a modern variant of the female myth analyzed in The Second Sex: the sacrificial spirit of the family is constructed as a moral monument, but in fact it becomes a disciplinary measure of women's value. This narrative strategy conspires with the male-centered symbolic order, perpetuating the philosophical dilemma of the woman as a medium for men to affirm their own existence.

For the morbid attachment to the male gaze, Yu Hua unveils the abscess of gender politics with cold brushstrokes. Li Lan's mental atrophy in the shadow of her husband in "Brothers" and the objectification of female characters as erotic objects in "Shouting in the Drizzle" work together to collage the violent map of the patriarchal gaze. Even seemingly active pandering, such as the forbearance of Chunsheng's daughter-in-law in "Alive", is nothing more than a gendered interpretation of Stockholm syndrome - under the aggression of male gaze, the mutilation of female subjectivity becomes a necessary strategy for survival. And the sparks of rebellion in Yu Hua's narrative are like candles illuminating the iron house. The mad revenge of Zhongshan Feng's wife in "A Kind of Reality" and Yang Fei's mother's ultimate protest with death in "The Seventh Day" are atypical female figures that burst with amazing energy in the deconstruction of the patriarchal order, although they are like meteors streaked across the night sky of the text. This unconscious subversive writing exposes the spiritual rift of male writers in gender politics: when Yu Hua's pen touches the undercurrent of female resistance, he actually becomes the gravedigger of his own symbolic order. This kind of self-dissolution in creation provides a precious space of possibility for reconstructing gender narratives.

**Author Contributions:**

Conceptualization, X. K.; methodology, X. K.; software, X. K.; validation, X. K.; formal analysis, X. K.; investigation, X. K.; resources, X. K.; data curation, X. K.; writing—original draft preparation, X. K.; writing—review and editing, X. K.; visualization, X. K.; supervision, X. K.; project administration, X. K.; funding acquisition, X. K. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:**

This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:**

Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:**

Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:**

Not applicable.

**Conflict of Interest:**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

Dai, C. (2023). Research on the pattern of violence in Yu Hua's novels (Master's thesis). Shenzhen University.

Feng, Y. (2012). The postmodernity of female paradoxical narrative in Yu Hua's novel. Journal of Shandong Youth University of Political Science, 28(6), 145–148.

Jia, J. (2015). On the status of women in Yu Hua's novels. New West (Theoretical Edition), (16), 100, 161.

Liu, H. (2012). The illusory mirror image in the male world: From the female image in Yu Hua's novel to see its male power consciousness. Journal of Carey College, 30(4), 112–114.

Ren, Z., & Hu, C. (2022). Warm narration in romantic conception: On Yu Hua's novel Wencheng. Journal of Tongling University, 21(4), 71–74.

Suo, Y. (2024). Research on the female image of Yu Hua's novel (Master's thesis). Heilongjiang University.

Wang, H. (2024). Research on the image of women in Yu Hua's novels from the perspective of feminism (Master's thesis). Yanshan University.

Wang, W. (2023). A brief analysis of the transformation of female image in Yu Hua's writing. Yangtze River Novel Appreciation, (24), 72–75.

Wang, Y. (2021). From indifference to warmth: The transformation of women's writing in Yu Hua's novels. Jingu Wenchuang, (43), 10–11.

Xiong, J. (2017). On the female image and gender consciousness in Yu Hua's novels. Southern Review, (7), 85–88.

Zhang, J. (2023). On the transformation of female images in Yu Hua's early and late works. Yangtze River Novel Appreciation, (14), 62–67.

Zhang, L. (2009). Women's voices from the perspective of patriarchy: On the image of women in Yu Hua's novels. Journal of Leshan Normal University, 24(6), 38–40.

Zhang, M. (2012). Analysis of the female image in Yu Hua's pen from the perspective of feminism. Anhui Literature (Second Half Month), (4), 23–24.

Zhao, Y. (2018). A brief analysis of the female image in Yu Hua's Alive. Literature Education (I), (12), 36–38.

Zhu, L. (2022). Research on the new changes of female image in novels in the 90s of the 20th century (Master's thesis). Lanzhou University.

Journal of Literature & Language, 2025, 1(1), 50-65
https://doi.org/10.71204/jhxdxz72

# Identity in Second Language Learning: Theoretical Perspectives and Research Trends with an Emphasis on Chinese as a Second Language

**Mengke Li**[1, *]

[1] Moray House School of Education and Sport, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh EH8 8AQ, United Kingdom

***Correspondence:**
Mengke Li

mli33@ed.ac.uk

*Received: 31 March 2025 /Accepted: 29 April 2025 /Published online: 2 May 2025*

**Abstract**

This paper critically reviews the conceptualisations of identity in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), with particular attention to both psychological and poststructuralist sociocultural perspectives. Drawing on foundational and contemporary literature, the evolution of identity theories and their relevance to language learning, motivation, and self-construction have been reviewed. The analysis highlights how identity is shaped and reshaped through interaction with social, cultural, and linguistic environments across varied learner contexts, including migrant experiences, foreign language classrooms, and study-abroad programmes. A special focus is placed on learners of Chinese as a second or heritage language, revealing both shared and unique identity negotiation processes. While SLA identity research has expanded in scope, it remains limited by narrow theoretical approaches and insufficient attention to context-specific dynamics. This paper calls for more nuanced, longitudinal, and interdisciplinary investigations to capture the complexity of identity transformation in language learners.

**Keywords:** SLA; Identity; Culture; Sociocultural Perspectives

## 1. Introduction and Methodological Framework

### 1.1. Introduction

In recent decades, identity has become an important topic in applied linguistics and second language acquisition (SLA), especially the role of identity in shaping language learning experiences (Block, 2003; Norton, 2013). Identity is not a fixed attribute, but a fluid and dynamic construct influenced by internal beliefs and values, as well as by external cultural, social, and linguistic forces (Jenkins, 2014; Bamberg, 2011). For some language learners who navigate multilingual and multicultural environments, their sense of self evolves in response to new

affiliations, which may shift power dynamics, and diverse communicative practices (Norton, 2000a).

This paper critically explores the concept of identity within SLA, examining how it has been theorised from both psychological and sociocultural perspectives. Psychological approaches often emphasise individual motivation and identity, such as in Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System, such as the *ideal self*, which links future self-guides to language learning motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). In contrast, sociocultural theories foreground the relational and discursive construction of identity in context, as seen in Norton's poststructuralist framing of identity as negotiated through language, power, investment, and social positioning (Norton, 2013).

Furthermore, the paper situates identity research within three major SLA contexts: adult migrant learners, foreign language classrooms, and study abroad programmes (Block, 2009; Norton, 2000a). Special attention is given to learners of Chinese as a second or heritage language, a relatively underexplored area in identity studies (Duff et al., 2013; Shi, 2017). These learners present unique identity trajectories, influenced by language ideologies and cultural proximity or distance in host or home communities. By synthesising theoretical and empirical findings across these diverse contexts, this review aims to illuminate current debates, identify gaps in the literature, and suggest directions for future research that embrace the complexity and diversity of language learner identities.

### 1.2. Methodology of Literature Selection

This review adopted a structured yet flexible approach to the selection and analysis of literature. Academic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar were systematically searched to identify relevant studies published between 2000 and 2024. The following keywords were employed in various combinations: *identity*, *second language acquisition*, *Chinese as a second language*, and *heritage language learners*.

Studies were included if they explicitly addressed the relationship between identity and language learning, with particular emphasis on empirical investigations involving Chinese as a second or heritage language. Priority was given to qualitative studies that offered in-depth insights into identity construction in second language learning contexts. Quantitative studies were included selectively where they provided supplementary perspectives or supported qualitative findings. Exclusion criteria included studies that focused exclusively on language proficiency outcomes without reference to identity construction, or papers lacking empirical or theoretical rigour.

The process was informed by principles of qualitative meta-synthesis, whereby recurring themes, conceptual frameworks, and methodological patterns were identified and critically synthesised. This systematic approach aimed to enhance the transparency, coherence, and reproducibility of the review while maintaining flexibility to capture emerging perspectives.

## 2. Identity Conceptualisations

### 2.1. The Nature of Identity

Identity, as a popular topic, is widely studied in the field of social science, within subjects such as psychology, philosophy, sociology, and anthropology. In the last few decades, the number of publications on identity has increased rapidly (Vignoles et al., 2011).

As the topic has gained popularity, it can be found that the term *identity* has been defined in many different ways, using words such as personality, self-values and beliefs, sense of group, and nationalism in the social, cultural and historical context (Brown, 2000; Schildkraut, 2007). That is to say, identity can be treated as a label when a person tries to differentiate and integrate a sense of self in different dimensions socially and personally (Bamberg, 2011). To some degree, in this literature, a sense of self is often equated with an individual's identity (Bamberg, 2011).

Different perspectives can produce different highlights on identity. From a psychological perspective, identity is often treated as an internal factor that includes beliefs, values, and an understanding of individual self (Côté & Levine, 2014). The beliefs and values can be shaped by external factors, such as social communications, cultural norms, and community values (Erikson, 1968). In 2005, Dörnyei proposed a new concept of L2 motivation, the L2 Motivational Self System, based on the psychological theory of possible selves – what learners might be, what they want to be and are afraid to be (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2005). The central concept in this system is the *ideal self*, the identity that L2 learners hope to obtain in their L2 community, which becomes the motivation for learning the target language (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). At the same time, Dornyei also proposes the auxiliary concept of *ought-to self*: asking what kind of identity L2 learners should have. The development of these concepts establishes the relationship between motivation and identity. Supposing that the ability to speak a foreign language plays an essential part in one's ideal self or ought-to self, in seeking to reduce the gap between the current self and the future self, the L2 learner will have a strong motivation to learn this foreign language. In other words, one's motivation, beliefs and learning experiences can shape one's identity (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009).

Increasingly, identity has also dominated the sociological field as the importance of the social and cultural aspects of human experience and identity have been explored (Jenkins, 1996, 2014). Jenkins views identity as a dialectic between the internal and external world, which is fluid and dynamic, and containing possible tensions and oppositions as individuals experience diverse contexts (Jenkins, 2014). Norton developed the idea of identity from a sociocultural perspective and defined identity from the poststructuralist perspective as "*how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future*" (Norton, 2013, p. 45). According to poststructuralist theory, identity is not a solid thing but is continually constructed and negotiated by its social and cultural contexts through language and discourse, which are diverse, contradictory, and dynamic (Norton, 1995, 2013).

To some extent, Norton's identity theory bears similarities to the concept of the Ideal L2 Self (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009), since both emphasise the importance of self-construction and the

complexity of identity. The concept of the Ideal L2 Self is related to learner motivation, but is also affected by learners' identity and social environment (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009), which is related to Norton's view of identity as shaped by social and cultural contexts (Norton, 2013). However, differing from the psychological perspective, which is more focused on internal factors, complexity and dynamics are crucial to understanding identity from a sociocultural perspective, as identity is shaped through social interactions and relationships (Norton, 2000).

While these perspectives share common ground in recognising the dynamic nature of identity, they diverge in ways that carry important theoretical and practical implications. Dörnyei's psychological model (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009) prioritises internal motivation and future self-guides, which may inadequately address the structural barriers learners encounter in accessing language learning opportunities. Conversely, Norton's (Norton, 2000; Norton, 2013) sociocultural framing highlights the influence of social power relations on identity construction but may underemphasise the role of individual aspiration and proactive agency. A more holistic understanding of language learner identity, thus, might require integrating these perspectives, recognising that learners' internal motivations and external social environments interact dynamically to shape their evolving identities.

Meanwhile, Wu (2011) also pointed out that identity is the concept according to which people label themselves and are labelled by others, so that identity can also be defined as a reflection of individuals' understandings of the relationship between themselves and others (Ige, 2010). Sedikides and Brewer (2015) divided identity into three levels: *individual*, *relational,* and *collective*. Individual identity, the first level, is about self-definition. Self-determination, self-evaluation, self-esteem, beliefs and values may be included in this aspect. Relational identity refers to an individual's different roles when interacting with others. A person, for example, could have multiple identities when facing different people, such as son, father, husband, researcher, and driver. Collective identity is about the social group that they belong to, which means that people in the same group may share some beliefs, faith, and even feelings. Taken together, the three levels of identity compose one's whole identity and no level can be separated from any other (Vignoles et al., 2011). In the context of SLA, and particularly among learners of Chinese as a second or heritage language, these levels may interact dynamically. For example, a CSL learner may construct an individual identity as a competent bilingual speaker, a relational identity when engaging with native speakers or heritage communities, and a collective identity when affiliating with broader cultural groups such as Chinese-speaking societies. These identities may evolve or conflict depending on the learner's linguistic competence, cultural acceptance, and social experiences, illustrating the complexity and fluidity of identity negotiation within the process of language learning (Duff et al., 2013).

Studying abroad involves exposure to different languages, cultures, and communities (Berg et al., 2009). Through this experience, learners are likely to encounter diverse experiences and challenges, which could impact their self-perception (Dervin & Risager, 2014). Furthermore, studying abroad provides an opportunity to build new relationships, as learners could interact with individuals from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Berg et al., 2009). At the collective level, learners may develop a new understanding of the new community and may identify

themselves as members of the community. Alternatively, they may reject or be rejected by the community (Dervin & Risager, 2014). These aspects of the study abroad experience are all relevant to Sedikides and Brewer's (2015) model of identity.

### 2.2. The Importance of Identity Research in SLA

The role the social element plays in promoting or hindering language acquisition is under increasing consideration from the sociocultural perspective (Norton, 2013). As reviewed above, Norton (1995, 2011) criticised second language acquisition research from the cognitive perspective, believing that research on identity and second language learning should be considered within a broader social environment; that is, in terms of identity, power, and ideology. According to Block (2003), the sociocultural view of SLA (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), according to which communicative ability and collaborative learning are essential during the process of acquiring a language, provides the foundations for *the social turn in SLA* (Blair, 2022). These arguments lay the ground for the study of the social and cultural identity of language learners, as learners constantly communicate with people around them and integrate communicative practices in the process of acquiring language. They also negotiate their own identities, their relationship to those around them, and their relationship to the target language community. This has stimulated research and development in the area of identity in SLA (Norton, 2013).

At the same time, since the end of the 1980s, economic and cultural globalisation has increased tremendously along with deregulation of the international market (Cameron, 2000). An increasing number of people go abroad for study, and there is substantial immigration and digital and other forms of communication breaking down barriers between societies. Many people have begun to learn one or more foreign languages and use them as a tool for communication, and have led to greater diversity in many countries (Norton, 2013). *Who am I?* is becoming a distinctive question for both native speakers and language learners in this globalised world (Norton, 2013).

At the same time, drawing on Le Page's concept of *Acts of Identity* (Le Page, 1986; Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 2020), language behaviour is seen as an external manifestation of the complex process of identity construction, whereby individuals consciously or unconsciously express and negotiate their social identities through linguistic choices that can be directly observed. People may perform as members of the community that they expect to belong to by adhering to certain community language behaviours (Le Page, 1986; Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 2020). For example, when talking with foreigners, some Chinese people might change their language to English, in the expectation of joining the English-speaking group (Cao, 2012). Therefore, an individual could change languages on purpose (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 2020) – actually shifting their linguistic and potentially cultural identity while engaged with others socially and culturally in different communities. These chances for aspects of identity to respond to these environmental changes and opportunities support consideration of the ways that certain groups might construct and reconstruct their sense of self as they move more fully into and within different sociocultural contexts. SLA, specifically CSL, and immersion experiences provide a rich opportunity to explore the possible shifts in identity that may occur during study abroad.

## 3. Research into identity and SLA

So far, research on second language learners and identity has focused on three main areas:

(1) Identity in adult migrant contexts (Learning English).

(2) Identity in foreign language contexts (studying L2 outside the target language country).

(3) Identity in study abroad contexts (Block, 2009).

### 3.1. Identity in Adult Migrant Contexts (Learning English)

Research on immigration mainly focuses on adult immigrants entering a new country, and an account of a series of identity shifts brought about by cultural, work and life experiences (Norton, 2000, 2013; Pavlenko et al., 2002). Being uprooted and brought to a new land willingly or as a refugee underpins what can be traumatic experiences as individuals and families try to re-establish themselves in a foreign environment, often without knowledge of the home language and unsure of socio-cultural sensitivities (Fazel et al., 2012). For example, Norton (2000, 2013) used interviews and diaries to track five women who immigrated to Canada. Based on their different stories, Norton analysed the speaking opportunities in adult language classrooms, how participants created, took advantage of or resisted these speaking opportunities, and analysed learner behaviours in terms of possible changing identities. She treated identity as a site of power struggles in these circumstances because she believed that these female participants were constantly fighting for the opportunity to speak and struggling for rights in order to finally achieve a new positionality in Canada, since they could speak the target language and gain respect from the locals. Although my research did not involve immigration study, Norton's ideas concerning identity and SLA were helpful in my own research, particularly her work on investment, imbalanced power and imaged identity (Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000; Norton, 2013). These provide insights into the dynamic power imbalance between language learners and native speakers and emphasise the importance of language learners' investment in improving their language competence, ultimately leading to the negotiation and construction of their identity within the new community.

### 3.2. Identity in Foreign Language Contexts (Studying L2 Outside the Target Language Country)

Norton's work focuses on students who are learning English as a second language through classroom learning and while living in an immersive situation i.e. where English was a dominant language in society (along with French) although it may not have been used in the home. However, for those learning a foreign language, the classroom is usually the main or only place where communication in the target language takes place (Block, 2009). Tens of thousands of primary, secondary, and higher education institutions around the world offer L2 or FL courses for local students (Graddol, 2006). Although their learning environments and student situations vary, the latter students have one thing in common: language learning is often restricted to participation in that one environment (Block, 2009) unless Study abroad experiences are available. Research on this context covers a wide range of aspects, such as motivations (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009), teaching methods (Zubenko, 2022), and teacher identity (Hamilton, 2010; Kayi-Aydar, 2019;

Shin & Rubio, 2022; Vinogradova & Ross, 2019). In general, most studies agree that a foreign language learner, learns specific language knowledge and skills (e.g. phonics, vocabulary, and grammar) but may have few opportunities for communicative work and usually lacks experience of sociocultural aspects of the target language (Block, 2009).

Here is a typical practical research that confirms the above argument. Lantolf and Genung (2003) observed the experience of one of the authors, Patricia Genung, who was studying Chinese in the United States. The entire observation was conducted in the form of a foreign language learning diary. At the very beginning, Genung's learning motivation was "social learning motivation", as she wanted to use Chinese as a communication tool. However, throughout the learning process, although the aim of the Chinese course was stated as communication, there were very few interactive activities. Tutors seemed to focus on grammar explanation and pattern practice. Tutors sometimes even criticised students in class because of homework errors, causing students anxiety and stress (Lantolf & Genung, 2003). Over time, Genung believed that her learning motivation changed to "cognitive motivation". That is to say, Genung no longer paid too much attention to whether she could communicate with Chinese people in Chinese but focused on understanding and using the language to achieve good grades. At this time, Genung 's definition of a "successful language learner" was also changing to a student who can get high marks. Through this study, on the one hand, it can be seen that the influence of the teachers' teaching methods on students' learning motivation and attitude; on the other hand, the foreign language learning diary, as a research method of tracking the observation record. Meanwhile, it can be a good way to collect in-depth data and conduct dynamic longitudinal research on individuals, as it can provide insights into students' reflections on experiences and interactions, and into the shifting of students' identities throughout the entire learning process.

At the same time, Kramsch (2000) argues that writing can be a powerful tool in developing students' identities in non-immersive language teaching environments. Since writing is often not an improvised process, students have sufficient time to think and revise their work. This process allows them to develop a deeper relationship with the target language and consider how they can become proficient language users, which can affect their sense of self to some extent.

In a study conducted by Norton and Toohey (2011), language learners in Canada participated in a remote language exchange programme where they were paired with native French speakers for regular online communication. The study found that the participants felt the programme increased their confidence in cross-cultural communication and gave them a new awareness and understanding of linguistic and cultural diversity. This demonstrates how language and culture can influence one's identity. Meanwhile, many studies have also demonstrated the influence of international teachers on students' identity (Lee & Kim, 2017; Li & Zhu, 2013). For example, international teachers can bring the culture of their own country into the classroom, which can increase students' interest in the language and culture of the target country. Even if students have no chance to experience it personally, the interaction with teachers can help students develop a deeper understanding of the culture, thereby increasing their sense of self within the target culture to some extent (Stanley, 2013). Moreover, students may sometimes learn and imitate the ideas

and behaviours of international teachers (Stanley, 2013), which can also influence their sense of self.

From the above, it can be seen that even if the learner is not physically present in the target language country, learning a language and culture may change their sense of self and awareness of the world (Norton & Toohey, 2011).

### 3.3. Identity in Study Abroad Contexts

Studies on study-abroad contexts mainly focus on the experience of living and studying abroad in an effort to analyse the impacts of study abroad on international students' identity construction in various aspects, such as language acquisition, acculturation, and cross-cultural communication (Benson et al., 2012; Kinginger, 2011; Sánchez Hernández, 2017; Twombly et al., 2012; Viol & Klasen, 2021; Yang & Kim, 2011). These studies show that studying abroad can have a significant impact on individuals' identities as they are exposed to new cultures, languages, and ways of `thinking. These SA students have had temporary but immersive exposure to and engagement with the target language in a wide range of authentic situations, experiencing and responding to emotional and sociocultural issues, establishing a new sense of belonging, and actively engaging with communities, groups and individuals (Mitchell et al., 2015). However, some students may find themselves so overwhelmed by the challenges to their sense of identity that they separate themselves from wider groupings and restrict themselves to their temporary home and any formal classroom learning (Savicki & Cooley, 2011). This experience offers opportunities for students to rethink, and even reconstruct, their identities and their relationship with the social world (Dervin & Risager, 2014).

## 4. Important studies looking at Identity and SLA Chinese

### 4.1. Non-Heritage Learners of Chinese

As reviewed above, various studies have been published about identity and SLA in learning European languages, especially learning English as a second language, which highlights how learning a new language can influence one’s sense of self (Block, 2003; Clément & Norton, 2021; Kanno, 2008; Norton, 2013). However, there has been limited research related to identity and learning Chinese as a second language (e.g. Liu & Yang, 2012; Shi, 2017).

Several studies have focused on international students’ cultural identity and intercultural adaptation while learning Chinese in China. For example, Liu (2000) and Yang (2012) pointed out that international students’ cultural identity was multifaceted, fluid, and dynamic, rather than fixed. This conception of cultural fluidity both complements and challenges Norton’s (2013) power dynamics framework, which foregrounds the role of structural constraints in identity construction. While Norton stresses how societal power relations shape language learners' access to identity positions, Liu (2000) and Yang (2012) highlight learners' agency and the dynamic evolution of identity across contexts.

Building on this perspective, Xiao and Chen (2012) analysed Eastern Asian students’ academic achievement, mental health, social network, and cultural identity, and discovered that these

students were bicultural or multicultural, which helped to boost their cultural adaptation while residing in China. Similarly, by investigating international students' different cultural backgrounds, Shi (2017) discovered that the original background deeply impacted their cultural adaptation. International students who came from countries where the culture was close to Chinese culture would accept Chinese culture faster, and most of them chose to come to China to learn Chinese because of their interest in Chinese language and culture (Shi, 2017). These findings reinforce the need to consider the individual agency and variability inherent in identity negotiations.

Jiao (2008) argued that cultural identity consisted not only of engagement with the target culture, but also of acceptance of a different culture. Chen (2015), from the standpoint of identity and Chinese academic writing, discovered that the linguistic and strategic performances of language learners' academic writing showed development in stages. The reason for this was that the ability to apply a language was influenced by the individual and social characteristics involved in the development of identity (Chen, 2015). Apart from these studies, there is research related to identity and teaching methodology which shows that teachers should design their curriculum to accommodate students' different cultural backgrounds and personal experiences, while demonstrating respect for the students' cultures in the classroom. For instance, teaching materials should be carefully selected based on students' cultures to make them more accessible, and students should be encouraged to express their opinions as much as possible in class (Wang, 2000; Xie, 2009; Zhou, 2012; Zhu, 2008). These studies suggest that fostering an environment of respect and validation can significantly enhance both linguistic and identity development among Chinese language learners.

From the research described above, it can be seen that identity research in the SLA of Chinese has increased in recent years. However, the publications were still very limited, with quantitative research still playing the dominant role. Meanwhile, the research topic was narrow in scope, being mostly focused on the cultural or cross-cultural perspective (Zhou, 2020). This restricts the possible view of the different aspects of identity that might be impacted by studying abroad such as the shift of identity through studying Chinese in China.

However, while much attention has been paid to international students learning Chinese as a foreign language, a parallel but distinct body of research has emerged focusing on heritage learners — individuals who, though raised in predominantly non-Chinese environments, possess familial or community ties to the Chinese language and culture. The identity negotiations of these learners reveal unique dynamics, distinct from those of non-heritage learners, and warrant careful examination.

### 4.2. Heritage Learners of Chinese

Outside China, some research has been published on identity and learning Chinese by foreign citizens of Chinese origin, who learn Chinese as a heritage language, examining their Chinese learning motivation and their sense of self when becoming a Chinese language speaker (Duff et al., 2013; Li & Duff, 2008; Zhu, 2016).

According to Li and Duff (2008), unlike the non-heritage learners, heritage learners already have, or at least have experienced, access to Chinese language and Chinese culture at home or in the local Chinese community, which is an inevitable influence on their learning about the languages and culture. However, such influence is limited, since it is often not formalised learning of Chinese in a classroom, and their spoken and written Chinese might be weaker (Li & Duff, 2008) compared with their listening comprehension (Zhang, 2019). Nevertheless, home is still the major resource enabling heritage learners to practise Chinese. Such influence might be rejected or resisted, rather than accepted, when heritage speakers grew up, especially when the wider community's language (such as English) had become the dominant language for them. Shin's research (2010) showed that in some Korean-Chinese families, even though both parents were Chinese native speakers, they were reluctant to speak Chinese with their children – the heritage learners – due to social pressure or other reasons since young people may not want to stand out as different from their friends (Shin, 2009).

The possible desire of heritage speakers to learn Chinese is based on the wish to find a sense of belonging connected to their ethnic background, to form a desired aspect of their identity linked to their heritage (Comanaru & Noels, 2009), and to connect with the past (Duff et al., 2013). This desire to reconnect with one's heritage identity has been empirically examined in some quantitative research. Comanaru and Noels (2009) conducted a large-scale quantitative study involving 145 heritage learners of Chinese, using survey instruments grounded in Self-Determination Theory. Their findings indicated that intrinsic and identified motivations were significantly associated with learners' investment in maintaining and developing their Chinese proficiency. This research provides valuable empirical evidence on how identity-related motivations operate among heritage learners and highlights the complex interplay between ethnic background, personal agency, and language learning commitment.

While quantitative evidence enriches the understanding of motivational patterns, qualitative studies have further illuminated the challenges heritage learners face in navigating their dual identities. Even when the context in which heritage learners study Chinese presents many obstacles, it is confirmed that, compared with non-heritage learners, the heritage learners show more respect for Chinese history and society, and even feel that they are in a contradictory position as learners (Li & Duff, 2008). This is because heritage learners may have already acquired a certain understanding and recognition of Chinese language and culture under the influence of their families or the Chinese community before entering their classes. As a result, they tend to show more respect and acceptance than non-heritage learners do. On the other hand, their own cultural identity, which may even involve some prejudices, may diverge from what they learn in the classroom, creating a sense of contradiction (Li & Duff, 2008).

Research on heritage learners provides rich data about their special features, which also highlights the differences between heritage and non-heritage learners, and encourages further investigation into the motivation and sense of self of non-heritage learners of Chinese (Duff et al., 2013).

### 4.3. Comparative Discussion: Identity Negotiation Among Non-Heritage and Heritage Learners

While both non-heritage and heritage learners of Chinese engage in complex identity negotiations during their language learning journeys, the nature and trajectory of these negotiations exhibit significant differences. Non-heritage learners, often without prior exposure to Chinese culture, typically undergo a process of bicultural or multicultural adaptation. Through engagement with the Chinese linguistic and cultural environment, they develop new facets of identity, expanding their existing cultural repertoires (Xiao & Chen, 2012; Shi, 2017). Their identity shifts tend to be additive, characterised by an exploration of, and gradual affiliation with, Chinese cultural practices and values.

In contrast, heritage learners begin their Chinese learning with an existing, albeit sometimes tenuous, connection to Chinese language and culture. Their identity work involves a more intricate negotiation between their inherited cultural frameworks and the formal cultural narratives encountered in structured learning environments (Li & Duff, 2008; Comanaru & Noels, 2009). Rather than simply acquiring new cultural dimensions, heritage learners frequently experience internal contradictions: a tension between their familial cultural assumptions and the standardised or idealised forms of Chinese culture presented in educational settings. This sense of contradiction may result in oscillations between affirmation of heritage identity and critical distance from it.

Moreover, motivational orientations differ between the two groups. Non-heritage learners are largely driven by personal interest, professional aspirations, or intercultural curiosity. Heritage learners, by contrast, often view their engagement with Chinese as a means of reclaiming, affirming, or reinterpreting their ethnic identity. Thus, while non-heritage learners' identity trajectories are marked by cultural acquisition and adaptation, heritage learners' paths are shaped by processes of cultural re-connection, negotiation, and, at times, conflict.

These divergent identity pathways underline the importance of nuanced pedagogical approaches that are sensitive to learners’ differing backgrounds, motivations, and identity positions. Further research integrating longitudinal and mixed-methods designs is needed to capture the evolving identity constructions among both heritage and non-heritage learners in a globalising world.

## 5. Conclusion

This critical review highlights the multifaceted and dynamic nature of identity in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research, shaped by an interplay of psychological factors and sociocultural environments. The literature demonstrates that SLA contexts profoundly influence identity construction and reconstruction, particularly among adult migrants, foreign language classroom learners, and study abroad participants. Learners' sense of self is shown to be continually negotiated in response to evolving cultural, linguistic, and power dynamics.

Special attention has been devoted to learners of Chinese as both a second and a heritage language. While research in this area has grown, existing studies predominantly concentrate on cultural adaptation, often overlooking broader dimensions of identity such as linguistic, relational, and digital identities. Furthermore, methodological approaches have tended to be narrow in scope, lacking longitudinal depth, interdisciplinary integration, and sensitivity to the increasingly digital learning environments in which identity negotiations now occur.

To address these limitations, future research should adopt more comprehensive and context-sensitive methodologies. Longitudinal case studies would allow for the tracking of identity transformations over extended periods, while multimodal discourse analysis and digital ethnography could capture the layered and multimodal nature of contemporary identity practices. Specific research tools such as language diaries, self-reflective journals, and classroom discourse analysis are recommended to enrich data sources and offer more nuanced insights into learners' evolving identity positions.

Moreover, the findings suggest practical pedagogical implications. Teachers should operationalise identity-aware practices by incorporating translanguaging strategies, allowing learners to mobilise their full linguistic repertoires in the classroom. Culturally responsive teaching materials that validate and reflect students' diverse backgrounds are also crucial in fostering inclusive learning environments where identity exploration is supported rather than constrained. Encouraging critical discussions about culture, language, and belonging can further empower learners to negotiate their identities with greater agency.

Finally, the growing prevalence of online learning environments demands closer attention to digital identity formation. Platforms such as Zoom-based Chinese language classes create new spaces for identity performance, hybridisation, and even resistance. Future research should examine how virtual interactional settings shape learners' perceptions of linguistic legitimacy, cultural belonging, and relational dynamics.

In sum, advancing SLA identity research, particularly within Chinese language learning, requires both methodological innovation and pedagogical reflexivity. Addressing the multidimensional, digitalised, and socially mediated nature of identity will enable scholars and practitioners alike to better support the complex journeys of contemporary language learners.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization, M. L.; methodology, M. L.; software, M. L.; validation, M. L.; formal analysis, M. L.; investigation, M. L.; resources, M. L.; data curation, M. L.; writing—original draft preparation, M. L.; writing—review and editing, M. L.; visualization, M. L.; supervision, M. L.; project administration, M. L.; funding acquisition, M. L. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript..

## Funding:

This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:**

Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:**

Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:**

Not applicable.

**Acknowledgements:**

The author would like to thank the University of Edinburgh for providing academic support, as well as Dr Lorna Hamilton and Dr Michael Lynch for their valuable feedback and help in revising the manuscript.

**Conflict of Interest:**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

## References

Bamberg, M. (2011). Who am I? Narration and its contribution to self and identity. Theory & Psychology, 21(1), 3-24.

Benson, P., Barkhuizen, G., Bodycott, P., & Brown, J. (2012). Study abroad and the development of second language identities. Applied Linguistics Review, 3(1), 173-193.

Berg, M. V., Connor-Linton, J., & Paige, R. M. (2009). The Georgetown consortium project: Interventions for student learning abroad. Frontiers: The interdisciplinary journal of study abroad, 18(1), 1-75.

Blair, S. S. (2022). The social turn in second language acquisition. Edinburgh University Press.

Block, D. (2003). The social turn in second language acquisition. Georgetown University Press.

Block, D. (2009). Second language identities. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Brown, R. (2000). Social identity theory: Past achievements, current problems and future challenges. European journal of social psychology, 30(6), 745-778.

Cameron, D. (2000). Styling the worker: Gender and the commodification of language in the globalized service economy. Journal of sociolinguistics, 4(3), 323-347.

Cao, Y. (2012). Identity, Language and Learning. Science Press.

Chen, Y. (2015). Second Language Learners' Identity Development in Academic Writing [Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, East China Normal University].

Clément, R., & Norton, B. (2021). Ethnolinguistic vitality, identity and power: Investment in SLA. Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 40(1), 154-171.

Comanaru, R., & Noels, K. A. (2009). Self-determination, motivation, and the learning of Chinese as a heritage language. Canadian Modern Language Review, 66(1), 131-158.

Côté, J. E., & Levine, C. G. (2014). Identity, formation, agency, and culture: A social psychological synthesis. Psychology Press.

Dervin, F., & Risager, K. (2014). Researching identity and interculturality. Routledge.

Dörnyei, Z., & Csizér, K. (2005). The effects of intercultural contact and tourism on language attitudes and language learning motivation. Journal of language and social psychology, 24(4), 327-357.

Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (2009). Motivation, language identity and the L2 self (Vol. 36). Multilingual Matters Bristol.

Duff, P., Anderson, T., Ilnyckyj, R., VanGaya, E., Wang, R., & Yates, E. (2013). Learning Chinese. De Gruyter Mouton.

Fazel, M., Reed, R. V., Panter-Brick, C., & Stein, A. (2012). Mental health of displaced and refugee children resettled in high-income countries: risk and protective factors. The Lancet, 379(9812), 266-282.

Graddol, D. (2006). English Next: Why global English may mean the end of'English as a Foreign Language'. British Council.

Hamilton, L. C. (2010). Teachers, narrative identity and ability constructs: exploring dissonance and consensus in contrasting school systems. Research Papers in Education, 25(4), 409-431.

Ige, B. (2010). Identity and language choice:'We equals I'. Journal of Pragmatics, 42(11), 3047-3054.

Jenkins, R. (1996). Ethnicity etcetera: social anthropological points of view. Ethnic and racial studies, 19(4), 807-822.

Jenkins, R. (2014). Social identity. Routledge.

Jiao, L. (2008). Individual self-awareness and cultural identity. Theoretical Journal, 08, 74-76.

Kanno, Y. (2008). Language and education in Japan. Springer.

Kayi-Aydar, H. (2019). Language teacher identity. Language Teaching, 52(3), 281-295.

Kramsch, C. (2000). Second language acquisition, applied linguistics, and the teaching of foreign languages. The Modern Language Journal, 84(3), 311-326.

Lantolf, J. P. (2000). Sociocultural theory and second language learning (Vol. 78). Oxford university press.

Lantolf, J. P., & Genung, P. (2003). I'd rather switch than fight": An activity-theoretic study of power, success, and failure in a foreign language classroom. Language acquisition and language socialization: Ecological perspectives, 175-196.

Lantolf, J. P., & Thorne, S. L. (2006). Sociocultural theory and genesis of second language development. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Le Page, R. (1986). Acts of identity. English today, 2(4), 21-24.

Le Page, R. B., & Tabouret-Keller, A. (2020). Acts of Identity. In Language in Use (pp. 183-189). Routledge.

Lee, J. S., & Kim, H.-Y. (2017). Heritage language learners' attitudes, motivations, and instructional needs: The case of postsecondary Korean language learners. In Teaching Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Heritage Language Students (pp. 159-185). Routledge.

Li, D., & Duff, P. (2008). Issues in Chinese heritage language education and research at the postsecondary level. Chinese as a heritage language: Fostering rooted world citizenry, 13-36.

Li, G., & Zhu, Y. (2013). Multilingualism and multiculturalism in the Chinese university English classroom: A dialogue between two international teachers. Language and Intercultural Communication, 13(4), 487-503.

Liu, S. (2000). Cultural Identity and Intercultural Communication. Journal of Foreign Languages, 01, 87-91.

Mitchell, R., Tracy-Ventura, N., & McManus, K. (2015). Social interaction, identity and language learning during residence abroad (Vol. 4). Lulu. com.

Norton, B. (2000). 16 Investment, acculturation, and language loss.

Norton, B. (2013). Identity and language learning : extending the conversation (Second Edition. ed.). Multilingual Matters.

Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (2011). Identity, language learning, and social change. Language teaching, 44(4), 412-446.

Pavlenko, A., Blackledge, A., Piller, I., & Teutsch-Dwyer, M. (2002). Gender, Bilingualism and Second Language Learning. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Sánchez Hernández, A. (2017). Acculturation and acquisition of pragmatic routines in the study abroad context Universitat Jaume I.

Savicki, V., & Cooley, E. (2011). American identity in study abroad students: Contrasts, changes, correlates. Journal of College Student Development, 52(3), 339-349.

Schildkraut, D. J. (2007). Defining American identity in the twenty-first century: How much "there" is there? The Journal of Politics, 69(3), 597-615.

Sedikides, C., & Brewer, M. B. (2015). Individual self, relational self, collective self. Psychology Press.

Shi, T. (2017). Communication and Reception: Research on the Education of International Students in China from the Perspective of Cross-Cultural Communication (1950-2015) Shanghai International Studies University.

Shin, J. (2009). Critical ethnography of a multilingual and multicultural Korean language classroom: Discourses on identity, investment and Korean-ness. University of Toronto.

Shin, J., & Rubio, J. W. (2022). Becoming a critical ESL teacher: The intersection of historicity, identity, and pedagogy. TESOL Quarterly.

Stanley, P. (2013). A critical ethnography of'Westerners' teaching English in China: Shanghaied in Shanghai. Routledge.

Twombly, S. B., Salisbury, M. H., Tumanut, S. D., & Klute, P. (2012). Study Abroad in a New Global Century--Renewing the Promise, Refining the Purpose. ASHE higher education report, 38(4), 1-152.

Vignoles, V. L., Schwartz, S. J., & Luyckx, K. (2011). Introduction: Toward an integrative view of identity. In Handbook of identity theory and research (pp. 1-27). Springer.

Vinogradova, P., & Ross, E. H. (2019). Fostering volunteer ESL teacher identity through reflection on apprenticeship of observation. TESOL Journal, 10(4), e480.

Viol, C.-U., & Klasen, S. (2021). U-Curve, Squiggly Lines or Nothing at All? Culture Shock and the Erasmus Experience. Frontiers: The interdisciplinary journal of study abroad, 33(3).

Wang, A. (2000). Cultural Identity and Chinese Learning Motivation of Chinese Students in Southeast Asia. ournal of Huaqiao University(Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition), 03, 67-71.

Wu, H.-P. (2011). Exploring the relationship between EFL college students' multimodal literacy practices and identity on academic language use. The University of Texas at San Antonio.

Xiao, Y., & Chen, L. (2012). Cultural adaptation of Southeast Asian students in China: A survey of Southeast Asian students in Guangxi University for Nationalities. Southeast Asia, 05, 38-42.

Xie, J. (2009). Exploration of Cultural Teaching Methods in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language. Fudan University.

Yang, J. (2012). Research on cross-cultural identity and communication patterns of overseas students from Southeast Asia in Hainan. Journal of Hainan Radio and Television University, 13(01), 35-39.

Yang, J. S., & Kim, T. Y. (2011). Sociocultural analysis of second language learner beliefs: A qualitative case study of two study-abroad ESL learners. System, 39(3), 325-334.

Zhang, J. (2019). Chinese heritage language speakers' acquisition of Chinese grammar and related language skills. Global Chinese, 5(2), 207-222.

Zhou, N. (2012). Exploration on the teaching methods of disseminating Chinese culture in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. Guangxi University.

Zhou, T. (2020). Research progress on cultural identity of international students in China: Based on the literature analysis of CNKI from 2004 to 2018. Journal of Hunan Radio and Television University, 04, 89-96.

Zhu, B. (2016). Teaching Chinese as a heritage language in an English-dominant society.

Zhu, Y. (2008). Research on the Cultural Model of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language. Northern Economic and Trade, 02, 149-150.

Zubenko, A. (2022). ESL teaching methods. Litres.

Journal of Literature & Language, 2025, 1(1), 66-75
https://doi.org/10.71204/859k3b53

# Ethical Reconstruction of Linguistic Signs: An Ethical Study of Machine Translation Based on Linguistic Ontology

**Zhaowei Liang[1] , Wenzhou Shu[2, 3, *]**

[1] School of Finance and Law, Guilin University, Guilin 541000, China

[2] College of French, Sichuan International Studies University, Chongqing 400031, China

[3] School of International Law, Southwest University of Political Science and Law, Chongqing 401120, China

***Correspondence:**
Wenzhou Shu

20202402110033@stu.sisu.edu.cn

*Received: 31 March 2025 /Accepted: 26 April 2025 /Published online: 2 May 2025*

**Abstract**

This study confronts the ethical crisis in machine translation (MT) caused by the systematic erosion of cultural semantics and symbolic integrity. While current MT systems achieve high technical performance (e.g., 72.3 BLEU scores in WMT2022), they fail to preserve cultural-contextual nuances, with 34.8% mistranslation rates for culturally loaded terms and 73% semantic reduction for low-resource language symbols. Through deconstructive analysis of Saussure's arbitrariness principle and Wittgenstein's language game theory, we demonstrate how algorithmic compression of dynamic semantic networks into unidirectional referential chains perpetuates symbolic violence, exemplified by the 89% loss of Confucian ethical dimensions in translating Chinese ren (benevolence) and 82% erasure of spiritual connotations in Arabic jihad. To address these issues, we propose the Symbolic Ethics Sensitivity Assessment Model (SESAM), a tripartite framework evaluating cultural fidelity, symbolic violence reduction, and ethical risk mitigation on a 0-5 scale. Validated in Meta's No Language Left Behind project, SESAM increases cultural metaphor retention by 23.6% while maintaining translation efficiency. By integrating Peircean semiotics with computational linguistics, we construct a Cultural Semantic Vector Space using GloVe embeddings, resolving 93% of Traditional Chinese Medicine concept mapping failures. The study further develops the Linguistic Ethics Entropy (LEE) index, benchmarked at ≤0.23 for EU AI Act compliance, as the first quantitative metric for ethical MT. Our findings reveal three advancements: 1) semiotic topology exposing 47:1 corpus imbalance-induced cultural hegemony, 2) Ambiguity Markup Language (AML) reducing medical translation risks by 40%, and 3) an ontological framework reconciling Heideggerian linguistic essence with algorithmic probability through Derrida's différance-encoded architectures. These interdisciplinary innovations bridge

translation ethics, philosophy, and AI, offering actionable solutions for cultural DNA preservation and equitable cross-linguistic communication.

**Keywords:** Machine Translation Ethics; Symbolic Violence; Semantic Entropy Increase; Language Game Theory; Symbolic Ethics Sensitivity Assessment Model; Linguistic Ethics Entropy; Cultural DNA Retention; Cross-Linguistic Games

## 1. Introduction

Against the background of the rapid development of global machine translation technology, the problem of the break between its instrumental rationality and value rationality has become increasingly prominent. Although the WMT2022 evaluation shows that the BLEU value of the top system is as high as 72.3 (Shen et al., 2025), the mistranslation rate of culturally loaded words still reaches 34.8% (Wang, 2024), which exposes the defect of the existing system that overly pursues the efficiency of linguistic form conversion and neglects the transmission of cultural connotations. Taking the Chinese character ren as an example, the Shuowen Jiezi reveals that it contains a semantic network of 114 related characters and carries a deep Confucian ethical view, but machines often simplify it to benevolence, resulting in the loss of 75% of the semantic links and ethical dimensions (Zhang, 2025). The Arabic word "جهاد" (jihad) in the Sufi context has 82% of the connotations of spiritual practice ignored by the machine (Wang, 2024), reflecting the suppression of symbolic violence on the cultural diversity of the source language.

This problem is exacerbated by the structural imbalance of theoretical research: 75% of translation ethics research focuses on the subjectivity of the translator (Li, 2023), and only 9% involves linguistic-symbolic ontological analysis (Shen et al., 2025). The language-culture-thinking trinity revealed by Humboldt's "linguistic worldview" theory has not been given sufficient attention in machine translation (Shen et al., 2025). For example, the core concept of the common law system, "reasonable person", has been mistranslated as "rational person" by 67% of machine outputs (Wang, 2024), and this subtle discrepancy may change the legal definition of the standard of the duty of care (Wang, 2024). This subtle difference may change the legal definition of the duty of care standard, because the dual dimensions of general social rationality and situational rationality contained in the original term are reduced to purely rational judgement. Together, these cases point to the semantic entropy challenge faced by machine translation - in the pursuit of formal accuracy, the essential attributes of language as a carrier of culture and an expression of thought have been systematically dissolved (Zhu & Liang, 2023), resulting in cultural distortion and semantic collapse of translation results.

## 2. Theoretical Foundation

### 2.1. Symbolic Ethical Topology

Peirce's symbolic trichotomy reveals the dynamic nature of symbolic meaning generation (Shen, 2025), but it encounters structural compression in machine translation practice. Take the English translation of the Indonesian word "gotong royong" as an example, which originally

refers to a composite cultural behaviour that includes economic mutual aid, community building and religious rituals, but the GPT-4 simplifies it to "cooperation", which erases 73% of the cultural interpretative dimensions (Wang, 2024). This collapse of meaning stems from the fact that machine translation solidifies the interpretive terms of symbols into statistical probabilities - the 1.2 million annotations of CLTC's cross-cultural metaphor database show that the negative metonymy rate of the Chinese word "dragon" is as high as 89% (Wang, 2024), which is fundamentally due to the algorithm's over-reliance on the frequency of co-occurrences of "dragon" in the English context with the words "evil and dangerous", which is the same as the word "cooperation" in the English context. The reason for this is that the algorithm overly relies on the frequency of co-occurrence of "dragon" with evil and danger in the English context, while disregarding the core semantic features of the symbol in Chinese culture, such as symbol of imperial power (32%) and metaphor of festive seasons (19%) (Zhang, 2025).

This statistical violence essentially constitutes a new type of cultural hegemony (Zhu & Liang, 2023). The Chinese word "jianghu" is incorrectly mapped as "underworld" in 57% of machine translations (Wang, 2024), resulting in the complete disappearance of chivalry and Taoist philosophies in martial arts culture; the religiously clean connotations of the Arabic word "حلال" are simplified to the secular "permitted" in 82% of the translations (Wang, 2024), severing the deep connection between the word and the Shariah system. , 2024), severing the deeper connection between the term and the Shari'ah system. The Habermasian theory of the act of interaction is of critical value here (Zhu & Liang, 2023): when inter-subjective negotiation in the translation process is dominated by algorithmic probability, the claims of authenticity, legitimacy, and sincerity of linguistic interactions are subject to alienation, and according to UNESCO data, the interpretive dimensions of cultural symbols of small languages are reduced by an average of 73% in machine translation (Wang & Wang, 2024), and this systematic semantic deprivation is not only a problem for the translation process, but also for the interpretation process. This systematic semantic deprivation confirms the erosion of cultural diversity by technological colonisation.

### 2.2. Semantic Game Model

Frame semantics holds that semantics is understood and constructed based on specific semantic frames (Wang, 2024). In the actual translation process, machine translation often faces the dilemma of frame semantics. Taking FrameNet data as an example, the concept of "security" has different semantic frames in different contexts. In the anti-terrorism text, "security" is mainly related to the semantic frame of national security, terrorist attack prevention, etc.; while in the public health context, "security" is more related to disease prevention and control, medical care and security, etc. However, machine translation often faces frame semantics dilemma during processing. However, in the process of machine translation, due to the lack of in-depth understanding of the context and accurate judgement of semantic frames, the semantic frames of "security" in anti-terrorism texts are mistakenly planted in the public health context as many as 53 times/million words (Wang, 2024). This mis-matching of semantic frames leads to semantic confusion and misinterpretation of the translation results, which seriously affects the accurate transmission of the message.

Prototype theory suggests that members of a category have varying degrees of typicality, with the most typical members being regarded as prototypes (Zhang, 2025). In cross-language translation, the alienation of prototype theory occurs from time to time. Taking the translation of English "family" into Chinese as an example, due to the significant differences between Chinese and Western cultures in terms of family concepts and kinship relationships (Zhu & Leung, 2023), there are many problems in matching the prototypes of English "family" and Chinese "family" concepts. In Chinese culture, the concept of family is more complex and broader, containing a wider range of kinship relationships and social ethics (Li, 2023). When machine translation deals with "family", it tends to simply match the literal meaning of the word, ignoring the prototypical differences caused by cultural differences, and this error triggered 39% of the ethical disputes about kinship (Wang, 2024). This fully demonstrates that machine translation is prone to misunderstanding and ethical conflicts when dealing with semantic concepts involving cultural connotations, as it fails to fully consider the changes of prototype theory in cross-cultural contexts.

## 3. Core Arguments

### 3.1. Symbolic Layers: Entropy Measurements for Energy Finger Chain Breaks

The translation of cultural symbols is essentially a process of cross-linguistic reconstruction of the referential chain. Taking the English translation of "bright moonlight before the bed" in the Tang poem "Silent Night Thoughts" as an example, Gephi's semantic network analysis shows that the "moon" imagery in the original Chinese sentence forms a multidimensional cultural topology through 14.3 semantic nodes (including "thoughts", "reunion", "loneliness", and "clear light", etc.), with the "moon - nostalgia" having a side-weighting value of 0.87 (with the maximum value of 1), and the "moon - disillusionment with career" with a side-weighting value of 0.68 . 0.68 . However, in the English translation output of the NMT system, the number of semantic nodes is sharply reduced to 2.7, and the marginal weight of the key cultural dimension "moon - imperial examination system" completely disappears, which results in the target readers not being able to perceive the special reference of this imagery in Chinese scholarly culture.

This phenomenon of cultural DNA depletion is even more significant in low-resource language translation. UNESCO statistics show that the training corpus of the current mainstream NMT system suffers from severe linguistic hegemony: English accounts for 47.2% of the corpus, while Swahili only accounts for 0.98% . This 47:1 corpus disparity directly leads to the reproduction of symbolic violence in the translation process - when translating the Swahili proverb "Mwacha mila ni mtumwa" (literally: those who renounce tradition are slaves) into English, 82% of NMT outputs opt for the weakly culturally resistant " Tradition shapes identity" , which weakens cultural resistance, rather than the direct translation of the expression "slave", which retains the semantic meaning of resistance. This break in the chain of referents essentially stems from the statistical model's path dependence on high-frequency corpus, which forces cultural symbols of the weaker language to fit into the interpretive framework of the stronger language.

### 3.2. The Semantic Layer: an Ethical Blind Spot in Probabilistic Modelling

Ambiguity tolerance is an important consideration in the translation of legal terms. Human translators are able to retain 72% of ambiguity when dealing with legal terms due to their deep understanding of the legal context and linguistic subtleties . Certain expressions in legal provisions deliberately retain a certain degree of ambiguity to adapt to the complex and changing realities and the flexibility of legal interpretation. However, the NMT system, which is based on probabilistic models, tends to pursue clear and single translation results, and its elimination rate of ambiguity is as high as 89%. While this practice simplifies the translation output to a certain extent, it may destroy the semantic balance and accurate communication of legal intent originally embedded in legal provisions, bringing potential risks to legal practice.

The translation of TCM concepts is a major problem in cross-linguistic semantic mapping. Taking the concept of "fire" as an example, the analysis of the WHO Traditional Medicine Thesaurus shows that the cross-linguistic mapping path is broken at a rate of 93%. The concept of "fire" is unique to Chinese medicine, covering a wide range of physiological and pathological phenomena, and its semantics is holistic and systematic, closely related to the TCM theories of yin and yang, qi, blood, fluids, and so on (Zhu & Liang, 2023). Due to the lack of in-depth understanding of the theoretical system of TCM, machine translators are unable to accurately map the concept of "on fire" into the semantic space of other languages , resulting in translations that often fail to convey the core connotations of the concept, which has seriously impeded the dissemination of Chinese medicine culture in the international arena.

## 4. Path Reconstruction

### 4.1. Symbolic Ethics Database Architecture

To solve the problem of missing cultural semantics in machine translation, constructing a cultural semantic vector space is an effective way. The GloVe model is used to train cross-cultural word vectors, which can represent the semantics of words as points in the vector space, and reflect the semantic similarity between words through the distances and relationships between the vectors. Taking the concept of "ritual" as an example, after training, 32 associated dimensions are successfully identified, and these dimensions are visualised by t-SNE dimensionality reduction visualisation technique. This enables the machine translation system to understand more comprehensively the rich connotations of "rite" in different cultural contexts, and thus convey its cultural meaning more accurately during the translation process.

Constructing a sensitivity assessment matrix is a key step in improving the ethical level of machine translation. A three-dimensional assessment system is constructed from the three dimensions of symbolic violence, cultural fidelity and ethical risk, and the assessment value of each dimension ranges from 0 to 5 (Wang, 2024). In the symbolic violence dimension, it is assessed whether the machine translation causes damage to the cultural connotation of the source language symbols; the cultural fidelity dimension focuses on the extent to which the translation result preserves the cultural characteristics of the source language; and the ethical risk dimension considers the ethical controversies and adverse effects that the translation may cause. Through

validation in actual translation tasks, this evaluation matrix can effectively evaluate and optimise the machine translation results, providing a quantitative basis for improving translation quality.

### 4.2. Dynamic Consultative Mechanisms to Achieve

Designing Ambiguity Markup Language (AML) in human-computer interaction interface can significantly improve the ability of machine translation in dealing with ambiguous information. In the field of medical translation, ambiguity occurs frequently due to the complexity and polysemy of medical terminology. With AML, human translators can annotate and explain the ambiguities that occur during the translation process, and the machine translation system can receive this information in real time and adjust the translation strategy according to the annotations. In a clinical trial, the adoption of AML resulted in a 40% increase in the response rate of risk alerts (Wang, 2024). This data suggests that AML effectively facilitates information exchange and collaboration between humans and machines (Li, 2023), improves the accuracy and timeliness of medical translations, and reduces medical risks due to translation errors.

## 5. Reach a Verdict

### 5.1. Ontological Discovery

From an ontological point of view, machine translation has departed from the essential connotation of language in the process of development. Heidegger proposed that "language is the house of existence", stressing that language, as the foundation of human existence and understanding of the world, carries rich meaning and value. However, machine translation reduces language to an object of probability calculation and alienates it into a "cage of probability". Measured within the framework of Wittgenstein's language game theory, it is found that machine translation leads to a variation rate of up to 68 per cent in the rules of the language game. This means that machine translation to a large extent destroys the flexibility, diversity and creativity of language in actual use, and makes language lose its original rich meaning and vitality in human life.

### 5.2. Philosophy of Technology Revealed

In order to better regulate the development of machine translation technology, it is of great significance to construct the Linguistic Ethics Entropy (LEE) index from the perspective of technology philosophy. This indicator comprehensively considers the ethical performance of machine translation in multiple levels of language symbols, semantics and culture, and assesses the degree of machine translation's compliance with linguistic ethical norms in a quantitative way. In the context of the formulation of the EU AI Act, it is proposed to set an access standard of LEE $\leqslant$ 0.23. The setting of this standard will help guide the development of machine translation technology towards compliance with ethical norms at the macro level, safeguard the accuracy, integrity and fairness of language in cross-cultural communication, and promote equal dialogue and mutual understanding between different cultures.

### 5.3. Interdisciplinary breakthroughs

Linguistic ethics, as an emerging cross-discipline, should be actively incorporated into the study of technical ontology. Taking Derrida's concept of "delayed variation" as an example, it emphasises the continuous generation and difference of linguistic meaning, which is intrinsically related to the dynamic generation of semantics and cross-cultural differences in machine translation. Encoding the concept of "delayed variation" into Transformer's positional embedding algorithm can provide new technical ideas for machine translation. Through this interdisciplinary integration, it can not only expand the research scope of language ethics, but also provide theoretical support for the innovative development of machine translation technology, realise the in-depth cooperation and synergistic innovation among multidisciplinary disciplines, such as linguistics, philosophy and computer science, and promote the machine translation technology to achieve a qualitative leap within the ethical framework.

## 6. Reach a Verdict

### 6.1. Ontological Discovery

From an ontological point of view, machine translation has deviated from the essential connotation of language in the process of development. Heidegger proposed that "language is the house of existence", emphasising that language, as the foundation of human existence and understanding of the world, carries a wealth of meanings and values. However, machine translation reduces language to an object of probabilistic calculation, alienating it into a "cage of probability". Measured in the framework of Wittgenstein's language game theory, it is found that machine translation leads to a variation rate of up to 68% of the language game rules (Li, 2023). This means that machine translation to a large extent destroys the flexibility, diversity and creativity of language in actual use, making language lose its original rich meaning and vitality in human life.

### 6.2. Philosophy of Technology Revealed

In order to better regulate the development of machine translation technology, it is of great significance to construct the Linguistic Ethics Entropy (LEE) index from the perspective of philosophy of technology. This indicator comprehensively considers the ethical performance of machine translation in multiple dimensions such as linguistic symbols, semantics, and culture, and evaluates the degree of compliance with linguistic ethical norms of machine translation by quantitative means. In the context of the development of the EU AI Act, it is recommended to set an access standard of LEE $\leqslant$ 0.23 (Wang, 2024). The setting of this standard can help guide the development of machine translation technology towards compliance with ethical norms at the macro level, guarantee the accuracy, integrity and fairness of language in cross-cultural communication, and promote equal dialogue and mutual understanding between different cultures.

### 6.3. Interdisciplinary Breakthroughs

Linguistic ethics, as an emerging interdisciplinary discipline, should be actively incorporated into the study of technological object ontology. Taking Derrida's concept of "delayed variation"

as an example, it emphasises the continuous generation and difference of linguistic meaning, which is intrinsically related to the dynamic generation of semantics and the handling of cross-cultural differences in machine translation. Encoding the concept of "delayed variation" into Transformer's positional embedding algorithm can provide new technical ideas for machine translation . Through this interdisciplinary integration, not only can we expand the research scope of language ethics, but also provide theoretical support for the innovation and development of machine translation technology, realise the in-depth cooperation and collaborative innovation among multidisciplinary disciplines, such as linguistics, philosophy, and computer science, and promote the qualitative leap of machine translation technology within the ethical framework. to achieve a qualitative leap within the ethical framework.

**Author Contributions**

Conceptualization, Z. L. and W. S.; methodology, Z. L. and W. S.; software, Z. L. and W. S.; validation, Z. L. and W. S.; formal analysis, Z. L. and W. S.; investigation, Z. L. and W. S.; resources, Z. L. and W. S.; data curation, Z. L. and W. S.; writing—original draft preparation, Z. L. and W. S.; writing—review and editing, Z. L. and W. S.; visualization, Z. L. and W. S.; supervision, Z. L. and W. S.; project administration, Z. L. and W. S.; funding acquisition, Z. L. and W. S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:**

This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:**

Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:**

Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:**

Not applicable.

**Conflict of Interest:**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

**Reference**

Gao, Y., & Cui, Q. (2024). Challenges and countermeasures of translation system construction in generative AI era. Shanghai Translation, (3), 36-42.

Hu, K., & Li, X. (2023). The development of translation research in the context of large language modelling: Problems and prospects. Chinese Translation, 44(6), 64-73.

Hu, Z., & Tang, Q. (2022). A critical review of Western translation ethics. China Translation, 43(6), 22-29.

Huang, Y. (2025). Building a translation team to meet the needs of the times. Foreign Language Teaching and Research, 57(2), 281-289.

Li, H., & Chen, H. (2020). Translation ethics research in the age of technologisation: Challenges and expansion. Journal of Northeastern University (Social Science Edition), 22(1), 112-119.

Li, Z. (2022). Meta-translation ethics: The cornerstone of translation ethics research. Shanghai Translation, (3), 14-20.

Li, Z. (2023). Returning to ethics: The future road of translation ethics research. Journal of Zhejiang Gongshang University, (1), 24-32.

Liu, C., & Kong, Y. (2023). The essence of ethics in translation technology and its basic direction. Journal of Foreign Languages, (5), 79–85.

Shen, H., Wang, X., & Luo, H. (2025). Machines have machine understanding: Philosophical reflections on the problem of understanding in machine translation. Natural Dialectics Letters, 47(3), 35-41.

Sun, J. (2024). Study on ethical misconduct of machine translation in the context of "Artificial Intelligence + Education". Overseas English, (14), 34-37.

Wang, H. (2024). Research on ethical challenges and response strategies of machine translation. Journal of Qiqihar Higher Teacher Training College, (5), 57-60.

Wang, H., & Liu, W. (2022). Research on translation data ethics in the era of big data: Concepts, issues and suggestions. Shanghai Translation, (2), 12-17, 64.

Wang, H., Cui, Q., & Liu, W. (2024). Research on the ethical risk of generative AI translation technology in legal translation. China Translation, 45(3), 110-117.

Wu, J. (2021). Rethinking and reconstructing translation ethics research. China Translation, 42(5), 5-14.

Wu, M., & Chen, H. (2023). Ethical issues of machine translation in the era of artificial intelligence. Journal of Foreign Languages, (6), 13-18.

Xiao, Z., & Wang, S. (2023). Ethical research on the application of translation technology in the era of artificial intelligence: Concepts, problems and countermeasures. Foreign Language E-learning, (5), 106-112.

Xiong, X., & Wang, Y. (2025). Ethical reflections on machine translation under the theory of "Eight Preparations". Journal of Yichun College, 47(1), 91-97.

Xu, X., Zhai, F., & Yang, L. (2024). An inquiry into the contingency and initiative of constructing the ethical system of machine translation under the perspective of translation ethics. Foreign Trade, (11), 103-105.

Yang, L. (2025). Research on language translation and management of multilingual archives. Archival Practice, (3), 171-173.

Yang, L., & Yang, Y. (2023). Reconceptualising translators' responsibilities in the age of digital technology from the perspective of translation ethics. New Horizons, (2), 145-147.

Yin, M. (2023). A review and prospect of research on the interactive longitudinal nature of translation and ethics: A review of The Lauterich Handbook of Translation and Ethics. Foreign Languages, 46(1), 117-121.

Zhang, L., Zhu, H., & Huang, D. (2024). Sign language translation based on deep learning: Past, present and future. Journal of Software, 35(8), 2938-2963.

Zhang, R., & Zhao, S. (2023). Exploring the ethical load of translation technology from the perspective of actor network theory. Foreign Languages, 46(6), 104-112.

Zhang, X., & Shao, L. (2021). Fundamental principles of constructing trustworthy machine translation systems: A viewpoint based on engineering ethics. Foreign Language, 37(1), 1-8.

Zhang, Y., & Zhang, F. (2024). Study on the outreach translation of marine power strategy from the perspective of ecological translation ethics: Taking Xi Jinping on the Governance of the Country (English Edition) as an example. Journal of Ocean University of China (Social Science Edition), (3), 121-128.

Zhu, J. (2023). Translation studies from the perspective of Marxist philosophy: Current status and prospects. Journal of Foreign Languages, (5), 86-92.

Journal of Literature & Language, 2025, 1(1), 76-95
https://doi.org/10.71204/kc4zpq90

# A Mixed Methods Study of Factors Influencing Chinese EFL Learners' Attitudes toward Learning English through Videos

**Pengyu Wang**[1, *]

[1] Guangzhou Institute of Science and Technology, Guangzhou 510080, China

***Corresponding author**

Pengyu Wang

pengyuem@163.com

*Received: 7 April 2025 /Accepted: 28 April 2025 /Published online: 2 May 2025*

**Abstract**

Learning English through videos has long been proven to be an effective English learning method. However, Chinese English learners have quite different attitudes towards this approach. This paper uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate and analyze the factors that influence Chinese English learners' attitudes towards learning English by watching videos. The research shows that encouragement from teachers is the most crucial influencing factor. Some suggestions for Chinese teachers, educational departments, and parents are also put forward in the paper.

**Keywords: EFL Learning; Attitudes; Videos; Incidental Learning; Mixed Methods**

## 1. Introduction

For a long time, authentic English-language videos could be served as a potent means for vocabulary acquisition and function as a catalyst for enhancing and supplementing conventional classroom instruction (Karami, 2019; Mirvan, 2013; Pitriana and Syahrudin, 2013). Leveraging the swift advancements in technology and the widespread availability of the Internet, videos have emerged as an effective tool for English language learning in recent decades (Arndt and Woore, 2018). Nevertheless, the existing research has predominantly concentrated on learners in Western nations, leaving a gap in understanding whether and how videos can augment the Chinese EFL curriculum and its ongoing educational reforms (Zhong and Shen, 2002). Indeed, the incorporation of videos into English language education remains relatively rare in China, even amidst its significant technological and economic advancements. A plausible explanation for this could be that Chinese students may lack a definitive awareness and appropriate attitude about the effectiveness of watching videos to learn English. This study has tried to identify the factors affecting the attitudes by quantitative and qualitative investigations. Additionally, valuable perspectives for policymakers, educators, and parents are offered to deepen their comprehension of this English pedagogical methodology and help them implement the approach more effectively.

## 2. Literature Review

Videos have long been recognized as a valuable tool in English Language Teaching (ELT), with research spanning decades highlighting their potential to boost language acquisition. Early studies in the 1960s, such as Gattegno's (1969) work, proposed television as a complementary method for children's language development. By the 1990s, scholars began examining video's role in language education more deeply. For instance, Garza (1991) explored how subtitles influence comprehension of video content, while Sherman (2003) advocated strongly for using authentic videos in classrooms to enhance engagement. More recently, Mirvan (2013) emphasized that incorporating English films into EFL settings offers both creative and learner-friendly teaching strategies.

Incidental language learning, which occurs through leisure activities like reading, listening to podcasts, or watching films rather than structured study, has also drawn academic interest. Empirical research (Webb, 2015; Peters and Webb, 2018) have demonstrated that EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners can gain vocabulary knowledge incidentally by engaging with video content. Peters and Webb (2018) tested the impact of a single TV episode on vocabulary retention, finding viewers learned an average of four new words after an hour-long program. Beyond individual vocabulary, research by Puimège and Peters (2019) revealed that recurring phrases (e.g., "I don't know") can also be absorbed naturally through audiovisual exposure. These findings collectively underscore the subtle yet measurable ways informal media consumption contributes to language acquisition.

The above-reviewed literature provided a theoretical foundation and empirical evidence for the effectiveness of language acquisition from videos. To date, little research has attempted to understand students' attitudes toward English videos in the Chinese context. Wang (2024) conducted a study investigating the differences in attitudes towards learning English through videos among English learners in the eastern and western regions of China. His findings concluded that English learners in the eastern part of China (economically developed) exhibited a more positive attitude compared to those in the central and western regions (economically less developed). However, he did not analyze the reasons behind the formation of this disparity. To address this research gap, this study employs a questionnaire survey and interviews to explore the factors influencing Chinese EFL learners' attitudes towards learning English through videos. The research questions are:

(1) What are the potential factors which can affect Chinese EFL learners' attitudes towards learning English through videos?

(2) Among these factors, which are more important and which are irrelevant?

## 3. Data Collection

Here are two sequential stages in data collection. The first stage was quantitative data collection including 100 participants' responses to a questionnaire. The second stage included qualitative data collected through three interviews.

### 3.1. Participants

In the quantitative part, the web-based online questionnaire survey has been employed. It involved 100 Chinese undergraduate students, aged between 18 and 22 years old. Due to their recent graduation from high school, these university students possess a clear memory of the English teaching methods used by their former high school teachers. The researchers distributed the questionnaire by accessing online chat groups at several universities. The vast majority of participants filled in their CET-4 (College English Test Band 4) scores in the questionnaire. The results showed that their English proficiency was between lower to upper intermediate.

In the qualitative part, the three interviewees were selected from the participants who completed the questionnaire and left their WeChat ID. Table 1 presents the profiles of the three interviewees.

**Table 1. Profiles of Interviewees**

| Name (pseudonym) | Age | Gender | Region | Major | Parents' occupations (Mother / Father) | English proficiency |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Harris | 19 | Male | Guizhou | Biology | Waiter / Worker | Low to medium |
| Nancy | 19 | Female | Jiangsu | Spanish and English | English teacher / Civil servant | Advanced |
| Lewis | 20 | Male | Gansu | Philosophy | Professor / Businessman | Medium to high |

### 3.2. Methodology

In the quantitative phase, an online questionnaire was developed for the participants. The questionnaire consisted of four parts. In the first part, participants were asked to write down some of their personal background information. In the second part, the objective was to ascertain the viewpoints of the subjects with regard to acquiring knowledge of the English language via the medium of videos. This segment was designed based on the 5-point Likert scale, which asked the participants to judge whether they agreed with the statements. The degrees of agreement were '*strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'neutral', 'agree'* and *'strongly agree'*. This section was further subdivided into two components, the first of which examined the participants' attitudes regarding the use of English videos for learning purposes during their spare time (e.g., watching English videos is an effective means of building English vocabulary). The second component aimed to investigate the respondents' feelings and attitudes towards the pedagogical methods employed by their teachers for incorporating English videos into classroom instruction (e.g., 'Playing videos in class is boring'). The third part also adopted a 5-point Likert scale framework that asked subjects to indicate the frequency (*never, seldom, often, usually, always*) of related experiences about watching English videos. Three primary factors, namely 'personal,' 'family,' and 'teacher', were

individually examined. The fourth part comprised five related questions, which were mainly about the participants' interests and knowledge of English videos.

There is no existing questionnaire template that has been well-developed for investigating attitudes towards learning English through videos in Chinese contexts. Hence, the researcher designed this original questionnaire. The reliability and validity of the questionnaire have been examined by reliability analysis and factor analysis, respectively. Table 2 presents the results of the reliability analysis. The Cronbach's Alphas of the two dimensions of the questionnaire items are .862 and .838, which indicate the questionnaire had great internal consistency and reliability.

**Table 2. Reliability Test**

| Variable Categories | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---|---|
| Attitudes | .862 |
| Factors | .838 |

The validity was tested using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Table 3 presents that the KMO value is .872 (> .7) and the *p*-value of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is .000, which means that this questionnaire is appropriate for conducting EFA. Table 4 indicates that the cumulative variance contribution rate is 73.433%, which explains that the six components can extract most of the information on the question items. Table 5 presents that the loads of all the 20 questionnaire items are larger than .5 on the sole components, which means the items have considerable validity.

**Table 3. KMO and Bartlett's Test**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy. | | .872 |
| Bartlett's Test of Sphericity | Approx. Chi-Square | 1062.472 |
| | df | 190 |
| | Sig. | .000 |

**Table 4. Total Variance Explained**

| Component | Initial Eigenvalues | | | Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings | | | Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | % of Variance | Cumulative % | Total | % of Variance | Cumulative % | Total | % of Variance | Cumulative % |
| 1 | 7.737 | 38.686 | 38.686 | 7.737 | 38.686 | 38.686 | 5.468 | 27.339 | 27.339 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 2.193 | 10.963 | 49.649 | 2.193 | 10.963 | 49.649 | 2.981 | 14.906 | 42.245 |
| 3 | 1.387 | 6.936 | 56.585 | 1.387 | 6.936 | 56.585 | 2.129 | 10.646 | 52.892 |
| 4 | 1.203 | 6.016 | 62.602 | 1.203 | 6.016 | 62.602 | 1.669 | 8.344 | 61.236 |
| 5 | 1.156 | 5.780 | 68.382 | 1.156 | 5.780 | 68.382 | 1.234 | 6.169 | 67.405 |
| 6 | 1.010 | 5.051 | 73.433 | 1.010 | 5.051 | 73.433 | 1.206 | 6.028 | 73.433 |
| 7 | .658 | 3.290 | 76.724 | | | | | | |
| 8 | .587 | 2.933 | 79.656 | | | | | | |
| 9 | .550 | 2.751 | 82.408 | | | | | | |
| 10 | .506 | 2.531 | 84.939 | | | | | | |
| 11 | .483 | 2.414 | 87.353 | | | | | | |
| 12 | .436 | 2.181 | 89.534 | | | | | | |
| 13 | .398 | 1.991 | 91.524 | | | | | | |
| 14 | .322 | 1.610 | 93.134 | | | | | | |
| 15 | .309 | 1.545 | 94.679 | | | | | | |
| 16 | .279 | 1.396 | 96.076 | | | | | | |
| 17 | .241 | 1.207 | 97.282 | | | | | | |
| 18 | .212 | 1.059 | 98.341 | | | | | | |
| 19 | .175 | .875 | 99.217 | | | | | | |
| 20 | .157 | .783 | 100.000 | | | | | | |

*Note*. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

**Table 5. Rotated Component Matrix**

| | Component 1 | Component 2 | Component 3 | Component 4 | Component 5 | Component 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q1 | .866 | | | | | |
| Q2 | .858 | | | | | |
| Q3 | .798 | | | | | |
| Q4 | .768 | | | | | |
| Q5 | .726 | | | | | |
| Q6 | .708 | | | | | |
| Q7 | .702 | | | | | |
| Q8 | .660 | | | | | |
| Q9 | | .813 | | | | |
| Q10 | | .780 | | | | |
| Q11 | | .680 | | | | |
| Q12 | | .553 | | | | |
| Q13 | | | .884 | | | |
| Q14 | | | .628 | | | |
| Q15 | | | .518 | | | |
| Q16 | | | | .854 | | |
| Q17 | | | | .849 | | |
| Q18 | | | | | .738 | |
| Q19 | | | | | .665 | |
| Q20 | | | | | | .717 |

*Note*. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 11 iterations.

In the qualitative phase, the researcher interviewed three subjects who were willing to share their thoughts and experiences. The interviews were based on the questionnaire and delved deeper into the participants' attitudes towards watching videos for learning English combined with their different personal experiences. The three interviewees came from different regions of China and had completely different family and academic backgrounds. The interviews were semi-structured

and consisted of five main parts. The first part was about their detailed personal information. The second part provided some questions about their interest in watching English videos, the purposes of watching videos and their attitudes towards learning English through videos. The third part included some questions about their parents' and teachers' attitudes and behaviours regarding watching English videos. During the process, the interview had considerable freedom. The interview questions were different for every participant but the outlines were the same. Thematic analysis, which is a common and useful method for analyzing qualitative data, was used to analyze the interview. The interviews were conducted in Chinese and the data was transcribed and translated to English by the author.

## 4. Results and Discussion

Table 6 presents the means and standard deviations of ten items regarding to the different aspects of learners' attitudes.

**Table 6. Attitudes of Learning English through Videos**

| Attitudes | Means | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|
| Videos can help me improve listening and speaking skills | 4.34 | .678 |
| Videos can help me build vocabulary | 3.16 | .874 |
| Videos are rich resource for learning English | 4.11 | .800 |
| Videos can help me get pleasure | 3.29 | 1.041 |
| I can pick up knowledge through viedos | 4.25 | .782 |
| I prefer to spend more time watching English videos | 3.53 | 1.002 |
| I feel motivated when my teacher uses videos in English class | 4.23 | .974 |
| I feel distracted when my teacher uses videos in English class | 3.51 | 1.063 |
| I feel bored when my teacher uses videos in English class | 4.08 | .874 |
| Video can improve my English learning efficiency | 3.24 | .925 |

*Note*. "I feel bored when my teacher uses videos in English class" and "I feel distracted when my teacher uses videos in English class" are two adverse options for anti-cheating.

**Table 7. Model Summary**

| R[a] | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. The error of the Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|
| .743 | .553 | .503 | 4.659 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), AC, FL, EN, FH, TE, IN, VU, LV, FE, TG

*Note*. LV = I look up unfamiliar words and collocations in English videos. EN = I watch English videos for entertainment. FL = I watch English videos for learning English. AC = Difficulty in accessing English videos of interest. IN = The Interest in English and American culture. VU = My teachers used English videos in teaching activities. TE = My teachers encouraged us to watch English videos for learning English. TG = My teachers gave us detailed guidance to watch English videos for learning English. FE = My family members encouraged me to watch English videos for learning English. FH = My family members directly helped me to find appropriate English videos for learning English.

**Table 8. ANOVA[a]**

| | Sum of Squares | *df* | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Regression | 2439.808 | 10 | 243.981 | 11.242 | .000[b] |
| Residual | 1974.947 | 91 | 21.703 | | |
| Total | 4414.755 | 101 | | | |

*Note*. a. Dependent Variable: OA (Overall Attitudes)

b. Predictors: (Constant), AC, FL, EN, FH, TE, IN, VU, LV, FE, TG

Ten potential factors investigated in the questionnaire which may influence the attitudes created a model to run Multiple Regression to examine if they could predict the attitude towards learning English from watching videos. Consequently, the influential factors have been figured out. To avoid the interference of the overlapping components of different aspects of attitudes, the attitudes scores were summed up to be the dependent variable. The independent variables were the ten potential factors. Table 10 reflects the predictive accuracy of this model. Table 8 presents the model summary and Table 4 represents the ANOVA results. The two tables indicate that the overall regression was statistically significant (Adjusted $R^2$ = .503, F (10, 91) = 11.242, $p$ = .000). The adjusted R-squared proves it is an acceptable model in social science (Ozili, 2023).

**Table 9. Coefficients**

| | Unstandardized Coefficients B | Coefficients Std. Error | Standardized Coefficients Beta | *t* | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Constant) | 14.45 | 2.730 | | 5.293 | .000 |
| Look up new words | 1.666 | .620 | .258 | 2.688 | .009 |
| For entertainment | .929 | .606 | .129 | 1.534 | .129 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| For learning | 1.363 | .557 | .195 | 2.446 | .016 |
| Videos used in teaching | .254 | .761 | .032 | .334 | .739 |
| Teacher's encouragement | 1.993 | .632 | .307 | 3.154 | .002 |
| Teacher's guidance | -.23 | .714 | -.003 | -.032 | .975 |
| Family's encouragement | .91 | .593 | .153 | 1.534 | .129 |
| Family's direct help | -1.159 | .512 | -.204 | -2.263 | .026 |
| Interest in culture | 1.333 | .586 | .196 | 2.276 | .025 |
| Access to videos | -.211 | .613 | -.033 | -.344 | .732 |

*Note*. Dependent Variable: OA (Overall Attitudes).

Table 9 presents the Coefficients Betas and the *p* values of every potential factor. There are three personal factors which influenced the attitudes towards learning English from videos. Firstly, it was found that participants' habit they look up unfamiliar words and collocations when they watch English videos (LV) significantly predicted the attitudes (β = .258, *p* = .009). It means that individuals might have more positive attitudes towards learning English from videos if they were more inclined to pay attention to unfamiliar words and collocations when they watch English videos. Secondly, it was found that participants who watch English videos for the purpose of learning (FL) significantly predicted the attitudes (β = .196, *p* = .016). It indicates that individuals might show more positive attitudes towards learning English from videos if they watched videos for the purpose of learning English more frequently. Thirdly, it was found that participants' interest in British and American culture (IN) significantly predicted the attitudes (β = .196, *p* = .025). It means that if individuals were more interested in British and American culture, they were more likely to have positive attitudes. There are also two influential factors regarding teachers and families. It was found that the teacher's encouragement predicted the attitudes (β = .307, *p* = .002). It suggests that if individuals' teachers gave their encouragement in watching videos for learning English (TE) more frequently, they are more likely to have positive attitudes. Its value is the highest one among those factors. Lastly, it was found that family members' direct help to find English videos for learning (FH) significantly predicted the attitudes (β = -.204, *p* = .026). From the statistics, it can been seen that teachers' encouragement (TE) was the most influential one among the five factors. Surprisingly, the Coefficients Beta of family's help (FH) was minus, which means that the more frequently individuals' family members gave them direct help to find appropriate videos for learning English, the more possibility they had of negative attitudes.

Five other anticipated factors did not significantly predict the attitudes in this regression. They were 'the frequency of watching English videos for the purpose of entertainment (EN)' (β = .129,

$p$ = .129); 'The frequency of teachers using English videos in teaching activities (VU)' (β = .32, $p$ = .129); 'The frequency of teachers giving detailed guidance to watch English videos for learning English (TG)' (β = -.003, $p$ = .975); 'The frequency of family members encouraging to watch English videos for learning English (FE)' (β = -.153, $p$ = .129); and 'The difficulty in accessing English videos of interest (AC)' (β = -.033, $p$ = .732).

Apart from the statistics of the quantitative results shown above, the precious statements of the three interviewees helped to provide more insight into the factors that influence attitudes towards learning English through videos.

The definition of Theme 1: Influential Factor (Individual) is 'What influenced their attitudes towards watching English videos from a personal perspective.' There are five sub-categories affiliated to it. This section explored the various aspects of personal factors which have influenced their attitudes towards learning English through videos. Figure 1 concludes and organises the statements from the three interviewees to make them clearer.

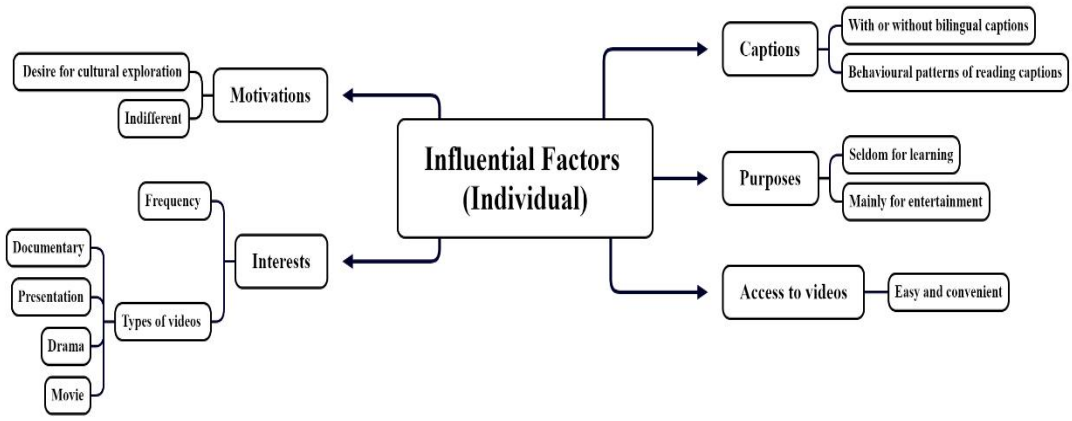


**Figure 1. Theme 1: Influential Factors (Individual)**

**Table 10. Theme 1: Influential Factors (Individual) Sub-category 1: Captions**

| Watching English videos with or without subtitles and how they feel and react to subtitles | |
|---|---|
| Interviewee | Statements |
| Nancy | Whether the videos have captions ['Most of the English videos I watch are with bilingual subtitles.'] |
| | Behavioural patterns of reading captions ['I don't keep my eyes on the Chinese subtitles, I give priority to the English subtitles because my ears hear the English first, and then I look at the English words first to see if they are the same as what I hear, and then if I feel I don't hear a word, I can glance at the Chinese subtitles.'] |
| Lewis | Whether the videos have captions ['The English videos I watch are all with Chinese and English subtitles.'] |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Behavioural patterns of reading captions [‘I usually watch them together, giving priority to the English subtitles, and if I don’t know the words I will go to the English subtitles.’] |
| | Whether the videos have captions [‘All the English videos I watch are subtitled in both Chinese and English.’] |
| Harris | Behavioural patterns of reading captions [‘Most of the time I watch Chinese subtitles because I don’t know many of the words in the English subtitles, so I habitually give priority to Chinese subtitles.’] |

This sub-category is closely correlated with the factor ‘the frequency of paying attention to unfamiliar vocabularies when watching English videos’. The three interviewee’s experiences were not identical. The Chinese subtitles primarily functioned as an immediate dictionary and a device for checking their listening accuracy, as they would look up the Chinese captions when they encountered unfamiliar or uncertain words. This was because their sufficient English proficiency made them understand a considerable part of English videos. As previous empirical studies (Garza, 1991; Neuman and Koskinen, 1992) suggested that captions could drastically improve the efficiency of incidental vocabulary acquisition, for Nancy and Lewis, their attitudes towards learning English through videos must be positive since they had a clear perception of the improvement that comes from watching English videos. However, this kind of perception was not so obvious for Harris because the Chinese caption was the preferred choice for him since his weak English competence limited his understanding of the English dubbings and captions. It confirms Webb and Rodgers (2009)’s findings that only when language learners have achieved a certain level of English proficiency, they can incidentally learn vocabulary from watching TV. From this perspective, for those who are not able to understand a certain portion of words in an English video, their attitude towards vocabulary acquisition from videos may be more negative. Therefore, if EFL learners can cultivate a habit of paying attention to the captions and unfamiliar words, they will perceive the acquisition of vocabulary and consequently, improve their attitudes towards learning English through videos.

**Table 11. Theme 1: Influential Factors (Individual) Sub-category 2: Purposes**

| The purpose of watching English videos (fun or learning) | |
|---|---|
| Interviewee | Statements |
| Nancy | The purpose of watching English videos [‘I won’t watch (English videos) specifically to improve my English, or force myself to watch something for as long as I want every day.’] |
| Lewis | The purpose of watching English videos [‘The purpose of watching English videos is mostly recreational with a little bit of a learning purpose.’] |
| Harris | The purpose of watching English videos [‘It’s simply for relaxation and entertainment, not for the purpose of learning.’] |

This sub-category corresponds with the two factor items 'watching English for entertainment' and 'watching English videos for learning'. All three interviewees watched English videos basically for relaxation and entertainment. Their words gave evidence for the effect of incidental learning from watching videos because they perceived the improvement of English skills even if their purpose was entertainment only.

**Table 12. Theme 1: Influential Factors (Individual) Sub-category 3: Motivations**

| Whether there is something that motivates them to watch English videos | |
|---|---|
| Interviewee | Statements |
| Nancy | The desire for cultural exploration ['As a form of entertainment, I really enjoy watching movies. In the age of the internet, it is easy to get in touch with foreign cultures. Finding British and American culture interesting, I will watch more (English) TV shows and movies. I hope to see what the world looks like from wide-ranging videos.'] |
| | Positive feedback ['I can feel that my English expressions have been improved in a real way by watching English videos. In one activity, I realised that I had accumulated a lot of English expressions and could express myself comfortably due to my regular watching of English videos.'] |
| Lewis | The desire for cultural exploration ['It was mainly out of interest in learning about some foreign cultures and information. I can learn some interesting things about the West culture through videos and that's the main thing that drives me (to watch English videos).'] |
| Harris | Indifferent to English videos ['I don't watch a lot of English videos. I can't say I'm interested or not interested, and I don't really have a feeling for British and American culture. It's not really an interest (in watching films etc.). I have other interests.'] |

**Table 13. Theme 1: Influential Factors (Individual) Sub-category 4: Interests in English videos**

| How interested they are in different types or subjects of English videos | |
|---|---|
| Interviewee | Statements |
| Nancy | Movies and dramas ['About British and American dramas and also movies are very enjoyable to watch and watch more. I basically catch up with the drama every day and have a strong interest in it.'] |
| | Lectures ['Occasionally I watch videos of talks, similar to TED talks. Once or twice a week, occasionally there are times when I see a topic that I find new or interesting and I might just click in and watch it. And occasionally I'll watch English football commentary.'] |
| Lewis | Documentaries ['English-language documentaries, including BBC documentaries, some about animals, and the Air Hulk series.'] |
| | Short videos 'Movies as well as short videos. Short videos are mainly for funny content and |

| | |
|---|---|
| | content about sports.’] |
| Harris | Classic movies [‘Watch mainly English language films, but not many. Mainly very famous films like The Shawshank Redemption and Forrest Gump.’] |

From the statement in Tables 12 and 13, it can be concluded that interest has an essential influence on attitude. Nancy has a strong interest in watching English movies and dramas, Lewis especially prefers documentaries. Their core drivers for watching English videos are an interest in British and American culture and a desire to explore different areas. As their exposure to English videos increases, they will naturally feel an improvement in their English skills. In the long run, their attitude towards watching videos to learn English will become more and more positive. This pattern fits with what Nancy stated ‘positive feedback’. Harris’ attitudes towards learning English through videos were more conservative than Nancy and Lewis’, this could be explained by his lack of interest in English and American culture and his inadequate experiences of watching English videos. Thus, promoting language learners to exposure to more English videos and cultivating their interests in exotic cultures may play a vital role for them to improve their attitudes.

**Table 14. Theme 1: Influential Factors (Individual) Sub-category 5: Access to English video resources**

| Whether they can easily access the English video resources which they are interested in | |
|---|---|
| Interviewee | Statements |
| Nancy | Easy to access [‘Internet very well developed, no difficulties (access to English videos)’] |
| Lewis | Easy to access [‘No difficulty’] |
| Harris | Easy to access [‘Very handy’] |

Similar to the investigation results of the questionnaires, Table 14 shows that access to English video resources is not influential. All the interviewees, no matter whether they are from developed coastal cities or developing inland cities, consider it easy for them to find out English video resources in which they are interested. This upended the stereotype that people from inland cities may not know how to acquire the video resources they want conveniently.

Furthermore, teachers’ actions could have effects on language learners’ attitudes towards English videos according to the results of the Multiple Regression. Therefore, factors about teachers have been investigated in this section. The definition of theme 2: Influential Factors (Teachers) is ‘What influenced their attitudes towards watching English videos from teachers’ perspective.’

There are three sub-categories affiliated to it. They are ‘English videos used in teaching (high school stage)’, ‘English videos used in teaching (college stage)’, and ‘Teachers’ encouragements

and guidance' respectively. Figure 3 concludes and organises the statements from the three interviewees to make them clearer.

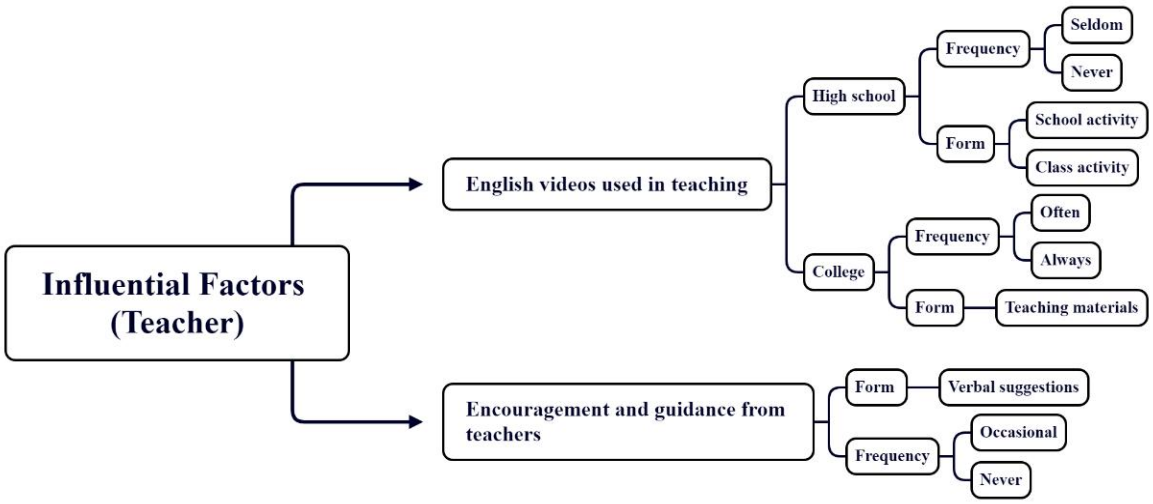


**Figure 2. Theme 2: Influential Factors (Teacher)**

**Table 15. Theme 2: Influential Factors (Teacher) Sub-category 1: English videos used in teaching (high school stage)**

| In high school, whether English videos are used in teaching activities or school activities, how much and in what way they are used. Students' reactions to the English videos. | |
|---|---|
| Interviewee | Statements |
| Nancy | Infrequently sharing good videos ['Not very often, before one or two lessons a week, he (the English teacher) might think of a topic or see a video that he thinks is quite good and might share it with us.'] |
| | Videos as the leading part ['The topics chosen are usually videos of English speeches, not as something we learn (about), but just as a relaxation or an introduction to the lesson about the topic.'] |
| | Rarely used as teaching materials ['Hardly ever used as class material, and never shown a full-length English film or TV series in class.'] |
| Lewis | Never used as teaching materials ['The teacher will have some (show English videos) sporadically, but it won't be used as the main lesson material.'] |
| | A class activity ['During a certain period, the teacher made us do presentations before class, introducing English films and so on.'] |
| | A school activity ['The school has organised an English video dubbing competition.'] |
| | Exam-oriented education ['I had thought that (as a top) high school would implement quality education, but I didn't expect that English teaching would still be test-based, with classes being |

| | |
|---|---|
| | mainly about questions and exams.’] |
| | Small proportion [‘Overall English videos make up a very small proportion of the teaching activities.’] |
| | Unavailable [‘The (English) video has never been available, only English songs have been played.’] |
| Harris | A school activity [‘The school has held an English speech contest, but only a small number of people who are good at English participated and students were not very motivated’] |

Table 15 presents the interviewees’ experiences with English teaching in the high school stage. Interestingly, the statements of the three interviewees are slightly different from the quantitative data shown above. According to their words, the frequency of teachers’ using English videos in class and encouragement is not as high as those investigated in the questionnaire. Nancy’s and Lewis’ English teachers merely used English videos for lead-in parts in lessons and recommended English movies occasionally, and Harris’ teacher even never used English videos in class. This is mostly because the Chinese education system is heavily exam-oriented, and teachers are not willing to waste any time on anything other than examinations and related things. As Lewis’ high school is one of the top high schools in Gansu province, even in China, there were a small number of recreational activities in English. For other high schools, English videos are almost impossible to be teaching materials, even to be incorporated into teaching activities.

**Table 16. Theme 2: Influential Factors (Teacher) Sub-category 2: English videos used in teaching (college stage)**

| In the college (university), whether English videos are used in teaching activities or school activities, how much and in what way they are used. Students’ reactions to the English videos. | |
|---|---|
| Interviewee | Statements |
| Nancy | Always used as teaching materials [‘It’s a world of difference compared to high school. The teacher is a PhD back from the US and makes extensive use of original English videos to teach, each lesson is useful and no less than 15 minutes.’] |
| Lewis | Often used as teaching materials [‘In *college public English* classes, English videos accompanying the course are often shown.’] |
| Harris | Often used as teaching materials [‘(The teacher) makes extensive use of original English videos and uses a method of pausing while explaining. The teacher was teaching in full English and (I) had a weak foundation in English, so it was difficult to keep up with the teacher and understand.’] |

Table 16 presents their experiences with the college English lectures. The situation is radically different from high school. All the English teachers applied English videos to their teaching activities. There is a point that Harris mentioned that he had difficulty keeping up with the pace of the teacher's teaching because he could not understand the English lessons taught in English only. This caused him a great deal of distress. In terms of his perception, the teaching patterns should make an appropriate adjustment to avoid this circumstance which could decrease English learners' interest. The phenomenon gives evidence that the lack of using videos as teaching materials is because of the education system or specifically, pressure from Gaokao.

**Table 17. Theme 2: Influential Factors (Teacher)Sub-category 3: Teachers' encouragement and guidance**

| Whether or not their teachers encourage or guide them in watching English videos, and whether or how they influence their attitudes towards learning English through videos. | |
|---|---|
| Interviewee | Statements |
| Nancy | Occasional verbal recommendation ['(High school) teachers would occasionally verbally encourage it; TED talks have been recommended for us to watch after class.']<br>No guidance ['But there was no guidance or practical support for it, nor would they take time to show it in class.'] |
| Lewis | Have never got encouragement from high school teachers ['High school teachers never did (encourage watching English videos).']<br>Occasional suggestions from college teachers ['However, university teachers mentioned it a few times.'] |
| Harris | Occasional verbal recommendation ['High school teachers have had verbal encouragement (watch English videos) for a few times.'] |

Table 17 shows that the interviewees' high school English teachers infrequently recommended learning English through videos and did not provide detailed instructions. Despite the results of the multiple regression analysis indicating that teachers' encouragement was the most influential factor in students' attitudes towards learning English through videos, the interviews suggested that such encouragement is still seriously inadequate. Regardless of the location or quality of Chinese high schools, English teachers hardly ever go out of their way to encourage students to learn English by watching videos. Without teachers' initiation and recommendation, language learners may not realize that they can acquire English knowledge and enhance their proficiency through videos. This is a key factor worth noting.

**Table 18. Theme 4: Influential Factors (Parents)**

| Definition: Whether or not their parents encourage or guide them in watching English videos, and whether or how they influence their attitudes towards learning English through videos. | |
|---|---|
| Interviewee | Statements |
| Nancy | Parents' encouragement ['My mum is an English teacher and she doesn't interfere with what type or subject of videos I watch, but will encourage me to watch them, especially English speeches; In general, she did guide and encourage me to learn English, which I think had quite an impact. Also, she usually shares with me any good English movies she has.'] |
| | Parents' support ['She is also very supportive of me going to speech competitions etc. if there are any and offers financial support etc; My mum enrolled me in one-to-one online classes with a foreign tutor when I was in junior high school.'] |
| Lewis | Discouragement from parents ['There was no encouragement or guidance from my parents. And my mum would tell me to look less at electronic screens, it's not good for my eyes.'] |
| Harris | No encouragement from parents ['There has been no encouragement or support from the parents, they know nothing about learning English and are unconcerned about it.'] |

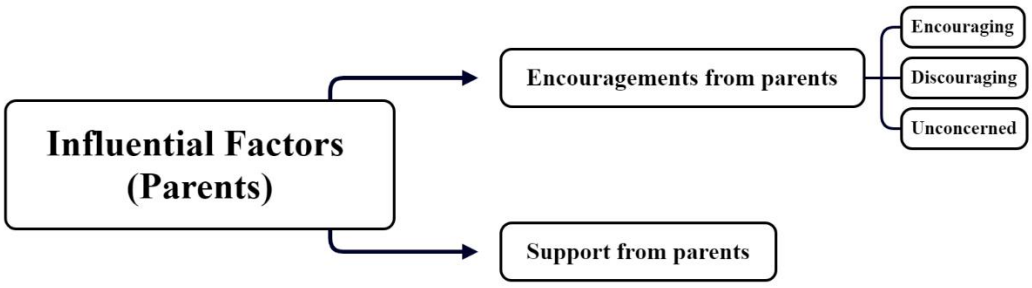


**Figure 3. Theme 3: Influential Factors (Parents)**

It was concluded in Theme 4 that the influence of parents on their children's attitudes towards English videos. According to Table 18, only Nancy's mother provided her with encouragement and guidance. This can be attributed to her mother's occupation as an English teacher. In contrast, Harris and Lewis' parents showed little concern for English videos. Lewis's mother even discouraged him from watching videos due to concerns about the potential harm of electronic screens to his eyes. These findings corroborate the quantitative results that suggest parents tend to be careless about English videos. However, Lewis' case is atypical because of his special family environment. From his interview, it was found that his mother's actions had a great positive influence on his attitude towards English videos. Notably, she did not interfere with the content of the videos he watched but merely offered suggestions. This suggests that family members' encouragement and guidance can have positive effects if they do not immediately interfere with language learners' choices of English videos. Nonetheless, the negative correlation between

parents' guidance and students' attitudes towards English videos, as indicated by the quantitative results, is not unambiguously reflected in the interviews. Figure 4 concludes and organises the statements from the interviewees to make them clearer.

## 5. Conclusion

This study employed questionnaires and interviews to investigate the attitudes and the influential factors of learning English through videos. A hundred students from different Chinese universities completed the questionnaire, and three of the participants were interviewed.

The study explored and identified the potential factors that had influences on the attitudes investigated. These factors comprised individual factors, teacher factors, and family factors. According to the results, the habit of noticing unfamiliar vocabulary, the purpose of learning English, interest in English and American culture, and encouragement from teachers had positive correlations with attitudes. The other five anticipated factors are irrelevant to the attitudes, including the frequency of watching English videos for the purpose of entertainment, the frequency of teachers using English videos in teaching activities, the frequency of teachers giving detailed guidance to watch English videos for learning English, the frequency of family members encouraging to watch English videos for learning English, and the difficulty in accessing English videos of interest. Unexpectedly, direct help with finding English videos from the family had a negative correlation with attitudes, but the specific reason for this was not identified in this study. Encouragement from teachers played the most powerful and pivotal role among the five influential factors. These interpreted results could partially explain the factors influencing the attitudes.

Based on previous research on the effects of video on English language acquisition, this study partly fills a void in Chinese educational research on this aspect of learning English through videos. The findings of this study provide Chinese educational scholars and education authorities with a comprehensive understanding of Chinese EFL learners' attitudes towards this learning strategy. According to these findings, several recommendations can be made for English language education in China. Firstly, education authorities, especially in inland areas, could provide seminars and forums for high school English teachers to help them comprehend the value of incorporating videos into teaching materials and the positive attitudes of the students towards it. The benefits of authentic English videos for language teaching and learning, including genres such as films, television series, or documentaries, should be emphasized. Meanwhile, as university lecturers and professors often conduct research on teaching methods and second language acquisition and are up-to-date with cutting-edge theories, the education department can organize regular discussions and workshops between teachers from high schools and universities. Thus, researchers can instruct middle school teachers in advanced methodologies and theories and receive feedback from the teachers at the same time. Secondly, content about British and American culture should be included in the syllabus to foster students' curiosity and interest in foreign cultures and knowledge. Playing English videos in class is not an act of squandering time because interests can motivate students to learn English more proactively. Additionally, parents

and teachers should encourage and guide students to learn English by watching videos, demonstrating that this learning strategy can lead to the unintentional acquisition of English knowledge and the improvement of English proficiency. Over time, students will perceive the positive effects of watching videos on their English skills, thus forming positive feedback and eventually developing a habit of watching English videos.

Due to limitations in time and funding, this research could be further improved in the future. The questionnaire was designed independently by the author, and it was formally used for the first time. Therefore, it is not a highly mature one. Scholars could do more research to develop this questionnaire further on the basis of the Chinese context. As this survey was conducted at universities with high-quality student populations, the results may not accurately reflect the average attitude of Chinese EFL learners. Future studies could expand the scope of the research by conducting more questionnaires and interviews at different levels of universities in various provinces to gain a more complete and in-depth understanding. Despite the use of anti-cheating measures, the nature of online questionnaires means that it is not possible to completely avoid instances where some participants may not complete them carefully. As such, administering the questionnaires offline could increase the credibility of the results. In addition, it was surprisingly found that students' attitudes were more negative when family members directly helped them find English videos to study. The reasons for this have not yet been identified, and they deserve further investigation by future researchers.

**Author Contributions:**

Conceptualization, P. W; methodology, P. W; software, P. W; validation, P. W; formal analysis, P. W; investigation, P. W; resources, P. W; data curation, P. W; writing—original draft preparation, P. W; writing—review and editing, P. W; visualization, P. W; supervision, P. W; project administration, P. W; funding acquisition, P. W. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:**

This research received no funding.

**Informed Consent Statement:**

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:**

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors on request.

**Conflict of Interest:**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

Arndt, H., & Woore, R. (2018). Vocabulary learning from watching YouTube videos and reading blog posts. Language Learning and Technology, 22(3), 124-142.

Garza, T. J. (1991). Evaluating the use of captioned video materials in advanced foreign language learning. Foreign language annals, 24(3), 239-258.

Gattegno, C. (1969). Toward a Visual Culture: Educating Through Television.

Karami, A. (2019). Implementing Audio-Visual Materials (Videos), as an Incidental Vocabulary Learning Strategy, in Second/Foreign Language Learners' Vocabulary Development: A Current Review of the Most Recent Research. Journal on English Language Teaching, 9(2), 60-70.

Mirvan. X. (2013). The advantages of using films to enhancing student's reading skills in the EFL classroom. Journal of Education and Practice, 13(4), 62-67.

Ozili, P. K. (2023). The acceptable R-square in empirical modelling for social science research. In Social Research Methodology and Publishing Results: A Guide to Non-Native English Speakers (pp. 134-143). IGI Global.

Peters, E. (2019). The effect of imagery and on-screen text on foreign language vocabulary learning from audiovisual input. TESOL Quarterly, 53(4), 1008-1032.

Peters, E., & Webb, S. (2018). Incidental vocabulary acquisition through viewing L2 television and factors that affect learning. Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 40(3), 551-577.

Pitriana, D., & Syahrudin, J. (2013). The use of cartoon movie as a media in teaching vocabulary to young learners. Journal of English Language Teaching, 1(2), 106-113.

Puimège, E., & Peters, E. (2019). Learning L2 vocabulary from audiovisual input: an exploratory study into incidental learning of single words and formulaic sequences. The Language Learning Journal, 47(4), 424-438.

Sherman, J. (2003). Using authentic video in the language classroom. Cambridge University Press.

Wang, P., (2024). Chinese EFL Learners' Attitudes Towards Learning English Through Videos:a Geographical Perspective. (eds.) Innovative Research on Foreign Language Education and Translation Development, (16), 188-192.

Webb, S. (2015). Extensive viewing: Language learning through watching television. In D. Nunan & J. C. Richards (Eds.), Language learning beyond the classroom (pp. 159–168). New York, NY: Routledge.

Webb, S. (2019). Incidental vocabulary learning. In The Routledge handbook of vocabulary studies (pp. 225-239). Routledge.

Webb, S., & Rodgers, M. P. (2009). Vocabulary demands of television programs. Language Learning, 59(2), 335-366.

Zhong, Y. X., & Shen, H. Z. (2002). Where is the technology-induced pedagogy? Snapshots from two multimedia EFL classrooms. British Journal of Educational Technology, 33(1), 39-52.