

Chapter 3

Language socialization in the homestay: American high school students in China

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The homestay component of study abroad is often credited with particular value for language learning. However, in quantitative studies of university students abroad, the putative “homestay advantage” has been difficult to prove. Some research with high school students suggests that younger students tend to develop more intimate relationships with their hosts than do their older counterparts. Based on audio interviews and recordings of conversational interactions, this paper draws on the language socialization framework to explore how two teenaged learners of Chinese were received by their hosts. The first was a student of limited Chinese proficiency who was socialized toward the expression of relational identity and familial intimacy through teasing. The second was a student of more advanced proficiency who participated in many interactions involving the socialization of taste, including Chinese food ways for the student, and American culinary practices for the family.

1. Introduction

What does it mean to be “at home” while also “abroad”? “Home” is often framed as the polar opposite of “abroad,” and evokes banal platitudes such as “home is where the heart is,” “home is where you mom is,” or “home is where, if you go there, they have to let you in.” In the scholarly literature, studies of dinnertime discourse clearly demonstrate that the familiarity children enjoy at home is the backdrop for a broad range of cognitive achievements. As they interact with trusted family members, children are socialized in myriad ways, learning everything from taste and table manners (Ochs, Pontecorvo & Fasulo, 1996) to political views (Gordon, 2004), locally accepted standards for narration (Blum-Kulka, 1997), or scientific thinking and theorizing about the world (Ochs & Taylor, 1992). At dinner, family members display and develop their relationships, thus carrying out the very activity that defines what it means to be a family. Through “repeated rites of passage to adult discourse” (Blum-Kulka, 1994, p. 45) beginning in infancy, and

in parallel with language development, children are socialized into practices, values, and moral stances of their communities.

In the context of student mobility, what kinds of learning take place when young people temporarily elect to join new families in a foreign country? Unlike immediate family members, student guests and host families do not usually share a common cultural background and social history. Neither are they familiar nor on intimate terms with each other. Meanwhile, in lay perceptions and publicity about study abroad, the homestay is credited with many virtues: students are offered first hand experiences of local cultural practices, pathways toward social networks expanded beyond the home, and of course, numerous opportunities to interact with hosts in ways that further language learning. To what extent do the rich and varied socialization processes of childhood also apply in the case of the many youthful strangers who live with families abroad?

1.1. A homestay advantage?

No doubt, many people who have enjoyed a successful homestay trace the acceleration of their language learning to that experience. In my own case, I was welcomed as a 19-year-old into the home of a farm family in the south of France. Their town, Prouilhe-par-Corniou, had a wintertime population of about 12, but the summer brought vacationers and returning extended family members along with all the routine work of animal husbandry, hay mowing, gardening and preserving. My host mother quickly realized that I had few practical skills, and set me the task of ironing socks and napkins. Over time, however, the family members patiently instructed me in farm and household chores. This instruction took place in the presence of many physical artifacts serving to clarify intended meaning: vegetables and fruits to be harvested, goats to be milked, cheese moulds to be filled, piglets to be evaluated for purchase, slugs to be washed off salad leaves, hay to be stacked. I was a college student, and legally at least, an adult and entitled to some degree of self-determination. Sometimes I experienced mild claustrophobia. But in Prouilhe-par-Corniou there was no escape and in any case there were no other Anglophones with whom to run away. I stayed, and learned to talk, to cook, to eat, to care for livestock, and to appreciate both waste-free, sustainable agriculture and the moral and religious values that sustained it in that place.

Therefore, among the many surprises in store when I began to investigate research on language learning abroad, the most astonishing was the discovery that the homestay is not a reliable environment for language learning abroad. At the macro-level of larger scale quantitative studies, no absolute correlation has been found between living arrangements and the development of proficiency. For example, Rivers (1998) examined the ACTFL OPI (American Council on the Teaching

of Foreign Languages Oral Proficiency Interview) scores of over 2500 dorm-stay versus homestay learners in the American Council of Teachers of Russian (ACTR) Student Records Base for the years 1976 through 1996. The students who had lived with families were *less* likely to develop speaking proficiency than those who did not. Similarly, in a project involving 830 learners of various languages, Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, and Paige (2009) found no relationship between housing type and OPI measures. Only when these researchers factored in the estimated amount of time that students spent with their families were they able to establish such a correlation. This finding prompted the authors to remark that “the variable that matters here is whether students take advantage of homestays by engaging with family members” (p. 16).

Turning to the qualitative literature, one of the only broad generalizations that can be advanced is that there is considerable variation in the extent to which student do, in fact, engage with host family members. Wilkinson (1998) contrasted the cases of “Molise,” who was warmly welcomed and gently assisted in her French language learning, and “Ashley,” whose host family did not bother to pick her up when she arrived, and subsequently demonstrated little interest in anything to do with her. The accounts of the Russian homestay in Pellegrino Aveni (2005) portray both “positive, supportive behavior” (p. 61) and terrifying, destructive behavior, including a host brother who, with support from his father, routinely played a game of “shoot the American” with a real, though unloaded handgun. In Kinginger (2008) there is the case of “Bill,” whose low proficiency in French and general humanistic goals were matched with a host family’s willingness to shepherd him through lengthy dinner table conversations focused mainly on his language learning. There is also, however, the case of “Ailis,” whose single host mother preferred to dine in the company of the television, and who returned from France having apparently forgotten some of the French she knew before the sojourn.

The success of the homestay as a learning environment seems to depend, on the one hand, on whether or not students are received as persons of consequence, deserving of the family’s attention and socializing efforts. To some extent, as Klapper and Rees have recently pointed out (2012), the nature of study abroad, including the homestay, can be viewed as arbitrary and idiosyncratic; much depends upon students’ emotional reaction to the hand they are dealt. On the other hand, however, this success also depends on how students position themselves in their adopted households, the efforts they make to understand the practices and motives of their hosts, and whether or not they can graciously accept the role of a temporary “child.”

A recent survey of 116 college-aged American language students (Juveland, 2011) revealed that, while these students do value the unique learning opportunities afforded in homestays, the most salient negative perception was of “decreased freedom as an adult” (p. 67). These students were concerned about lack of privacy,

the imposition of rules or curfews, and the indignity of being interpreted as incompetent and childlike. And in fact, when Iino (2006) investigated the approaches of Japanese host families, he found a continuum ranging from “two-way enrichment,” favoring intercultural dialogue and learning for all parties, to “cultural dependency” in which students were considered fundamentally helpless and occasionally positioned as exotic family “pets” (p. 162).

The literature on the homestay experiences of high school students suggests (if it does not prove) that younger learners may be more likely than their college-aged peers to be received *in loco parentis* as temporary children, and to tolerate and benefit from this arrangement more easily. This may be due in part to the host families’ acceptance of legal responsibility for the safety and well being of their charges. US-based students in particular have yet to experience the taste of freedom from familial oversight that university study typically offers. In any case, the scant research on this phenomenon shows that high school students frequently make dramatic gains in proficiency and report numerous opportunities to interact in various settings involving all generations of their host families and the families’ social networks. This was the case for Hashimoto’s (1993) 16-year-old Australian who arrived in Japan with no functional language ability and, a year later, had developed a broad communicative repertoire along with considerable awareness of pragmatic norms. Three of the four American high school students followed by Spenader (2011) through their year-long sojourn in Sweden arrived knowing no Swedish but returned home with “Superior” (professional level) proficiency. When Perrefort (2008) compared the portrayal of Erasmus versus a European secondary school programme in interviews with veterans, she found that only the high school students highlighted language-learning experiences, including the importance of intense local engagement for overcoming linguistic insecurity. The Erasmus students tended to categorize themselves as “spectators” (p. 77) and expressed frustration at their inability to access local social networks. Similarly, when interviewed (Kingerger & Tan, 2013), participants in the same Chinese language programme under consideration here claimed that the homestay experience had offered significant engagement in everyday communicative settings, and has improved their proficiency “exponentially” in comparison with classroom learning.

1.2. Language socialization in the homestay

If high school homestay sojourners sometimes display remarkable gains in proficiency, and tend to offer praise for the intensity and variety of their participation in communicative events, what, in particular, takes place in their exchanges with hosts? To answer such a question, the natural choice of framework is language socialization, that is, research examining how “acquiring a language is part of a

much larger process of becoming a person in society” (Ochs, 2002, p. 106). Through language socialization, children and other novices develop the “communicative competence, membership, and legitimacy” (Duff, 2007, p. 310) required for participation in the social life of communities, including both routine language and literacy practices and the accompanying preferences for action, emotion, and thought. Language socialization theory is both holistic and particularistic; it emphasizes how novices are socialized to use language and at the same time are socialized through language toward community activities and worldviews. Language socialization research therefore attempts to elucidate the dialectic relationship that obtains between particular socializing events and their broader socio-cultural environments, linking microethnographic study with a maximally holistic interpretive frame.

Originally articulated by Ochs and Schieffelin (1984), language socialization locates its primary disciplinary source in linguistic anthropology, but borrows liberally from other fields, such as sociology, linguistics, and education, depending upon the goals of each project. A key influence on the early development of the approach was the work on interactional and communicative competence by Gumperz (1982) and Hymes (1972). To recall, Hymes argued against a sole focus on linguistic competence and for a broader construct, communicative competence, which “involves knowing not only the linguistic code, but also what to say to whom, and how to say it appropriately in any given situation” (Saville-Troike, 2003, p. 18). Another significant contribution to the early framing of the approach (Duff, 2007; Ochs, 1986, p. 2) were the views on the integrity of language, mind and society outlined by Vygotsky (1962, 1978) which have evolved into contemporary sociocultural theory (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). As a theory of the mediated mind, sociocultural theory portrays the development of higher order cognition from the outside in, that is, through interaction with artifacts or more expert people in the Zone of Proximal Development. Novices are seen to internalize language and other semiotic resources through active participation at various levels of engagement (from observation to full participation) and in so doing, transform their own cognition and, potentially, the nature of the activity itself. Development is viewed as an historical, or *genetic* process at various interrelated levels, including phylogenesis, sociocultural history, the ontogenesis of the individual, and microgenesis, or the history of particular psychological functions over short periods of time as development takes place “right before one’s eyes” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 61).

Early language socialization research focused exclusively on illustrating the cultural specificity of language and literacy socialization in childhood (Heath, 1983; Ochs, 1988; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). Today, the scope of this work has expanded to include the study of second or multiple language socialization of novices of diverse age and in a variety of settings (Duff, 2012). At the same time,

the field has been influenced by “the poststructuralist realization that learning is a non-linear, relational human activity, co-constructed between humans and their environment, contingent upon their position in space and history, and a site of struggle for the control of power and memory” (Kramsch, 2002, p. 5). In particular, such poststructuralist views encourage scrutiny of the subtle processes through which power is circulated and reproduced in language learning and use (McNamara, 2012), and researchers are increasingly aware that this process can be dynamic, negotiated, and contested. In the case of language learners abroad, if they do gain access to socializing encounters, this process may be accepted, resisted, or rejected, and may lead to innovative or hybrid identities.

Very few studies involve direct observation of language socialization processes in homestays abroad. Wilkinson (2002) scrutinized the conversations taking place between students of modest proficiency in French and their host families in France. Her findings demonstrate the significance of prior socialization into the use of classroom discourse, as the students displayed a marked preference for pedagogical talk (including the infamous Initiation- Response- Evaluation structure) in their attempts to converse. Cook (2008) examined how Japanese host families socialized student guests to use the addressee honorific *masu* form. In this study, the families provided both modeling and explicit instruction which progressively guided the students toward the ability to shift from plain to honorific style in ways that are appropriate for “in group” communication.

Another study by Cook (2006) examined the collaborative telling of “folk beliefs” in dinnertime conversations between Japanese hosts and student guests. By “folk belief” Cook means the assertion of generalizations about some aspect of Japanese or the host student’s culture, including stereotypes. The Japanese host families’ beliefs were frequently interpretable in relation to *nihonjinron*, an ideology framing the Japanese culture and food ways as exceptionally unique and therefore inaccessible to foreigners. Food and eating habits were frequently discussed, including the belief that Americans cannot live without beef, or the belief that foreigners cannot bear to eat fermented soybeans (*natto*). While many of the assertions discussed went uncontested, the student guests challenged them in 40.4% of cases, typically, out of concern for politeness, by providing counter examples. Cook concludes that in the case of these interactions, a “two-way enrichment” (Iino, 2006) process took place. By submitting them to scrutiny and challenge from a different cultural perspective, both student guests and hosts became aware that their own implicit assumptions might not be reliable or based in truth.

DuFon (2006) examined the socialization of taste for American students in Indonesia. From data collected over a period of five years (field notes, language learning journals, and recordings of dinner table interactions), DuFon extracted various themes, including orientation to the food, food as pleasure, rituals involv-

ing food, and food and health. Because the students were often unfamiliar with the dishes on offer, their hosts instructed them on the names of foods and ingredients in ways that greatly resemble the classroom pattern drills of the audio-lingual era:

- Bruce: *Saya senang. Apa namanya?*
I like this. What is it called?
- Ibu Djumandi: *Jagung.*
Corn.
- Bruce: *Jagung saya?*
Just corn?
- Ibu Djumandi: *Dadar jagung.*
Corn pancake.
- Bruce: *Dadar.*
Pancake.
- Ibu Djumandi: *Dadar jagung.*
Corn pancake.
- Bruce: *(Dadar jagung.)*
(Corn pancake.)

(Dufon, 2006, p. 98)

Indonesian hosts also emphasized the pleasure to be taken in eating, and educated their guests about the aesthetics of their cuisine, including the practice of direct, unmitigated criticism of dishes improperly prepared. They also attempted, often without success, to convey their views about the influence of food on health, e.g. the belief that iced beverages can aggravate a cough.

In concluding her report, DuFon hypothesized that orientation to food is likely to occur in many homestay settings, although the precise nature of this practice may vary. She also noted that the dinner table was a key context for language learning in her study and that this setting “offers many opportunities for learning through the use of language about a culture’s values, beliefs, attitudes and view of food, and for learning to use the language in certain ways in order to talk about food” (pp. 117-118).

2. The current project

The current project is an exploration of the particular socialization practices taking place in the short-term homestay programmes that are now the norm for American students abroad. It was inspired in part by comments of earlier programme participants to the effect that the homestay is a rich environment for language and culture learning (Kinginger & Tan, 2013), and in part by previous quantitative research measuring dramatic gains in language ability for high school students abroad. Our data come from an intensive Chinese language

programme (Landon-in-China) enrolling American high school students for two- to four-week homestays in Beijing and Chengdu. While the brevity of the programme precluded longer-term documentation of socialization outcomes, we can examine the families' and students' attempts to socialize each other and, on occasion, we can also observe the microgenesis of particular language features. This paper offers brief considerations of two participants' experiences: 1) a student of modest proficiency (David) who became actively involved in his host family's routine practice of teasing; and 2) a student of more advanced proficiency (Sam) who participated in many interactions involving the socialization of taste.

2.1. *Setting*

Data were collected from 12 students and 22 host families involved in the Landon-in-China programme in the summers of 2011 and 2012. The regular programme included a two-week tour followed by a four-week language immersion period during which students were placed individually with Chinese host families for two weeks in Beijing and then in Chengdu. The host families typically included one host sibling whose interests were matched with those of the guest. An optional three-week internship was also available in combination with the programme or as a separate offering; in this case students were placed in homes where the parents' professional interests aligned with theirs.

The Landon-in-China programme was unlike offerings for college-aged students in that the programme operated *in loco parentis* for the students. The programme director, chaperones and faculty from the United States, the Chinese host parents and siblings, as well as instructors hired locally, jointly assumed responsibility for the students' well-being and the quality of their experience. Although the programme expressly discouraged American participants from gathering together after school, they were very rarely alone. With the exception of the morning intensive language classes, the programme invited all Chinese host brothers and sisters to join in its afternoon activities as well as weekend trips to surrounding sites of interest. The programme also attempted to match the ages, interests, and hobbies of the participants with those of the host siblings.

2.2. *Participants*

When David joined the Landon-in-China programme, he was a rising junior, 16 years of age. David's family had immigrated to the US from Ecuador to pursue professional opportunities. He grew up in a Spanish-speaking household and was bilingual in English and Spanish. He had studied Chinese for two years, and was

described by the programme director as possessing a caring and open personality, displaying strong desire to learn about other cultures, and proud of his own cultural heritage.

At 17, Sam was entering his final year in high school. His parents had emigrated from Ethiopia as teenagers, raising their children to be bilingual in Amharic and English. Sam had studied Chinese for 11 years, beginning with a maths, science and social studies Chinese immersion programme in elementary school. He had taken an Advanced Placement course as a high school junior, awarding him college-level credit for language study.

David's Beijing hosts included a mother (HM), a father (HF) and a sister (HS) of approximately David's age. Sam's Beijing hosts included a mother (HM), a father (HF) and a brother (HB) of approximately Sam's age. All of the participants, students and hosts, are of relatively privileged socioeconomic backgrounds, with the parents employed in professional or managerial roles.

2.3. Data

Data for this study include field notes from observation performed by the programme director, transcriptions of semi-structured interviews at the programme's end with students and host families, and audio recorded interactions. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the Pennsylvania State University, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. David provided us with six separate and sequential recordings of interactions in various settings totaling 170 minutes. Sam recorded nine sequential mealtime interactions totaling 262 minutes, with an average length of 29 minutes.

2.4. Analysis

The aim of the project was to understand the specific communicative practices that students like David and Sam are referencing when they describe the Chinese homestay as a rich environment for language and culture learning (Kinging & Tan, 2013). In David's case, our first overview of the data revealed that the family, and eventually David, were involved in frequent episodes of teasing, so we elected to focus on the evolution of David's participation in this particular, routine speech event. In Sam's case, a considerable amount of the talk was devoted to the topic of food and taste. We first isolated the many taste-related episodes, and determined that these accounted for nearly a quarter (24.9%) of the talk. We then classified these episodes by thematic category, and analyzed episodes typifying each theme as opportunities for learning for Sam and his hosts.

From language socialization theory we borrow the idea that language learning is more than the mere accumulation of usable forms, but is linked in a

dialectical relationship with the learning of culture in a holistic process of “becoming a person in society” (Ochs, 2002, p. 106). Also relevant to our analysis are several key notions from sociocultural theory (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). A fundamental notion is that human action, including thinking and speaking, is mediated by cultural-psychological tools (Kozulin, 1998), especially semiotic tools such as language. While built on a biological substrate, the higher mental functions are cultural and historical in origin. Second is the conceptualization of learning as process of internalization. Through engagement with other human beings and with culturally-evolved artifacts, learners gradually develop internalized repertoires for thinking and speaking that are provided by the sociocultural environments they frequent. Third is Vygotsky’s (1978) *genetic* method based on his understanding of development as a dynamic, historical process, and calling for observation of this process as it takes place “right before one’s eyes” (p. 61). Particularly relevant for our study is the microgenetic study of interactive settings and affordances where researchers may trace the history of particular functions over short periods of time, in this case the participants’ ability to participate in the expression of intimacy through teasing, for David, and talking and think about Chinese and American taste, for Sam.

3. Findings

3.1. *Teasing and familial intimacy*

The recordings provided by David included numerous instances during which his host family engaged in teasing, an interactional practice that normally indexes a degree of familiarity and intimacy. Specifically, teasing is a form of situational humor in which participants create a “play frame” on a backdrop of shared knowledge and assumptions, using both utterances and suprasegmental features and/ or nonverbal communication (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997, p. 277). Teasing is pleasurable because, like irony and other forms of humor, it involves the interpretation of hidden meaning (Tannen, 1986). More importantly, and although it can be a high-risk game, teasing can support the display and development of relationships. Specifically, among intimates or friends, the successful negotiation of identity through humour results in bonding and the enhancement of relationships. Teasing can also play an important pedagogical role because it often invokes societal norms and their violation (e.g., Schieffelin, 1986).

We therefore hypothesized that involving David in this practice, and eventually inviting his participation, was an index of the degree to which he developed an intimate relationship with his hosts. From the beginning of his stay, he was party

to teasing on the part of his host family members. Before the entire assembled extended family, his host sister was teased about her relatively poor academic performance in comparison to a classmate. His host sister retaliated later on in teasing her mother about the effects of age on her appearance. Toward the end of his stay, our data show that David became the target of his family's situational humour. Specifically, David had revealed his distaste for seafood, which the family had to date avoided serving in an effort to please him. However, when enjoying a packet of snack crackers, David's HM and HS noticed that the crackers had a theme, namely SpongeBob SquarePants, the undersea cartoon hero and his equally aquatic friends Patrick Star, Mr. Krabs, Squidward Tentacles, and Plankton:

Excerpt 1¹

1. HM: **chī** **ba** ((passing the food to David))
eat PRT
(Please) eat
tiāo **yí** **ge**
pick:up one CLF
Pick up one
(LAUGHTER) <@ **tā** **bù** **chī yú** @>
 he NEG eat fish
 He doesn't eat fish
2. HM&HS: **(LAUGHTER)**
3. David: **yú** **(LAUGHTER)**
fish
Fish
4. HM: <@ **zhè dōu** @> **(LAUGHTER)**
 this all
 This is all
5. HS: <@ ((indecipherable)) @>
6. David: <@ **Yeah yeah** @>
7. HM: **(H)**
8. David: **and that**
9. HM: **zhè dōu shì hǎixiān**
 this all COP seafood
 This is all seafood
10. All **(LAUGHTER)**

In this case, the teasing invokes David's violation of the Chinese moral precept that one should not disclose personal food preferences, especially as a guest. Such disclosure may of course cause inconvenience for the host, but the precept is itself

1 Conversational data were transcribed according to an adapted version of the Dubois et al. (1993) discourse transcription system (Appendix A and B).

embedded in a larger concept of etiquette involving the avoidance of waste, learning to appreciate food in all its forms (Cooper, 1986; Hsu & Hsu, 1997), and valuing the “five tastes in harmony.” According to an expert on Chinese food ways, “...when eating, one should not be inclined to eat excessively only the foods with one particular taste and ignore the others. ‘Harmony’ is the essence of Chinese philosophy” (Liu, 2011, p. 73). Seen in this light, the activity taking place in Excerpt 1 is not just teasing, but also reinforcing a morality (the avoidance of disclosing food preferences) that is tied to ideology and identity.

At the very end of his stay, David became an active participant in his host family’s intimate practice of teasing. In Excerpt 2, we find David and his host family discussing the photos in a family album, including many pictures of HS as an infant. HS had repeatedly expressed her annoyance both at having her baby pictures revealed and at the participants’ comments about those pictures. In this case, the presence of a physical artifact clearly assisted David in following the topical content of the talk, which occurred in cycles, with comments following the presentation of each photo’s theme. Earlier in the interaction, David had succeeded in amusing the entire family by suggesting that HS looked “fierce” in one of the photos. Here, once again, his contribution was deemed humorous:

Excerpt 2

1. HM: **zhège shì HS**
 this:CLF COP (name)
 This is HS
2. David: **(LAUGHTER)**
3. HM: **hěn xiǎo hěn xiǎo**
 very little very little
 Very little, very little.
 zhè yàng hǎoxiàng dōu bú dào yí- yí- yí suì
 this look seem even NEG arrive one one one year:old
 (She) looks to be not even one, one, one year old
 yí suì?
 one year:old
 one year old?
 ha?
 PRT
 right?
 zhè shì
 this COP
 This is
 (LAUGHTER) <@ zhèige gèng xiǎo @>
 this:CLF more young
 This one, even younger
4. David: **(LAUGHTER)**

5. HM: **tā xiǎo shíhòu jiù zhè yàng**
 she little when already this look
 When little, she already looked like this
suǒyǐ tā xiǎo chéng zhè yàng
 so she small become this look
 so she was this small
6. David: **(LAUGHTER)**
7. HF: **(LAUGHTER)**
8. David: **That's you?** ((referring to HS))
9. HM: **(LAUGHTER)**
10. HF: **mh**
 INT
 Yeah
11. HS: **ou= (LAUGHTER)**
 PRT
 Oh
12. David: **méi yóu toufa**
 NEG exist hair
 No hair
13. All: **(LAUGHTER)**

Laughter at the expense of the grown-up “baby” in the photo may well be common in middle-class households around the world. In this particular case, situational humour was clearly intended to reinforce the affective bonds that the family had been building with David throughout his stay. In tracing the development of David’s ability to participate in the (potentially risky) teasing, we suggest that his sojourn led to the onset of socialization toward familial intimacy despite his modest initial proficiency. Perhaps, it is these kinds of personally meaningful interactions that students are referencing when they describe the homestay as a rich environment for language and culture learning.

3.2. Talking about food

Unlike David, Sam arrived in Beijing having invested considerable time and effort in learning Chinese, and was able to begin active participation in home-based conversations, occasionally supported by his family’s proficiency in English, from the beginning. Sam had attended an elementary school offering Chinese immersion in maths and science, and had then continued to study Chinese throughout his school years, culminating in an Advanced Placement (college-level) course. He had taken several short trips to China and had spent the previous summer in an intensive residential Chinese course in the US. Sam participated only in the optional internship aspect of the programme, and lived with a family whose father worked at the same petrochemical company where Sam was temporarily employed. All of the recordings that Sam provided for the study were of mealtime interactions

whose topical content was dominated by questions of food and taste. The themes of these conversations paralleled those of DuFon's (2006) research: orientation to food, food as pleasure, and food and health.

Sam's HM routinely oriented him to the foods she served in much the same manner that was observed for Indonesian hosts by DuFon (2006). That is, she labeled dishes and ingredients and had Sam repeat the labels. In Excerpt 3, from Sam's first recording, the family was eating rice porridge (congee) with mung beans. HM first ensured that Sam could name the dish itself, then, shortly afterwards, its ingredients.

Excerpt 3

1. HM: **Sam zhīdào zhèige jiào shénme me**
 know this:CLF call what PRT
Sam (do you) know what this is called?
nǐ chī de nèige wǎn límian de
 2sg eat NOM that:CLF bowl inside NOM
what you're eating in the bowl
2. S: **bù- bù zhīdào**
 NEG NEG know
(I) don-don't know
3. HM: **zhèige shì**
 this:CLF COP
this is
zhè jiào xīfan
 this call thin:rice
this is called congee
4. S: **xīfan**
 thin:rice
congee
5. HM: **[xī]fan**
 thin:rice
congee
- [13 turns]
19. HM: **Sam what do you call**
this
20. S: **uh bean?**
uh s- I donno what [that is]
21. HM: **[bean] bean**
uh bean maybe is
a little bigger than this
22. S: **mbm**
23. HM: **than this bean**
24. S: **um**
wǒ bù zhīdào
 1sg NEG know
I don't know

25. HM: **Chinese**
in Chinese is
lǜdòu
green:bean
mung beans
26. S: **lǜdòu**
green:bean
mung beans
27. HM: **yah so**
xīfàn
thin:rice
congee
zhèige lǐmiàn jùshi
this:CLF inside ADV:COP
Inside it is what we call
rice and
28. HF: **lǜdòu**
green:bean
mung beans
29. HM: **lǜdòu**
green:bean
mung beans
30. S: **mbm**
31. HM: **dànmǐ hé lǜdòu**
rice and green:bean
rice and mung beans
32. S: **dànmǐ hé lǜdòu**
rice and green:bean
rice and mung beans
33. HM: **yah**

Like the data examined by DuFon (2006), this interaction exhibits a strong pedagogical cast: it greatly resembles a classroom vocabulary lesson in the IRE (Initiation- Response- Evaluation) structure. In three separate cycles, separated by an interval in which HM inquired about a word in English, HM as “teacher” introduced a lexical item, had Sam repeat it, and confirmed that his repetition was correct, either through further repetition of her own (Turns 3 – 5) or with an explicit evaluation (Turns 25 – 27 and 31 – 33). Here, however, the talk differs significantly from classroom discourse in that it is *relevant* to the immediate demands of the situation. Thus, in Vygotskian terms, we claim that HM was working in Sam’s Zone of Proximal Development. First, she located this Zone by determining that Sam did not know how to name the dish, then, rather than simply telling him what it was called, she and HF assisted his performance in naming the foods himself. What we are observing here, then, is one episode in the microgenetic development of Sam’s ability to talk about Chinese food.

Another common practice at the dinner table was the negotiation of “folk beliefs” (Cook, 2006) about food as pleasure and the relationship of food and health. For example, Sam contested HF’s claim that Americans invest little effort in cookery, and attended to HM’s complaints about the fast food she had been obliged to eat during a business trip to the US. He was also party to HB’s ongoing socialization, as HM chided him for failing to eat enough or to choose enough vegetables. In Excerpt 4, from the sixth recording, Sam attempts to defend the hamburger as a nutritious food, offering his HM an alternative view but failing to convince her:

Excerpt 4

1. S: **unb wǒ – wǒ yào gěi nǐ shuō**
unb 1sg 1sg want give 2sg say
unb I-I want to say to you
nǐ ub ub
 2sg *ub ub*
 you *ub ub*
mēi-zài mēiguō suóyǒu de hànbao bú shì
 Amer-in America all ASSOC hamburgers NEG COP
 In America, all hamburgers aren’t
bú shì duì shēntǐ bù hǎo
 NEG COP for body NEG good
 aren’t bad for the health
2. HM:
[èn]
 INT
 mhm
3. S: **[yīnwei] zài méiguó zhǐ zhǐ yǒu ub**
 because in America only only have *ub*
 because in America there’s only only *ub*
màidāngláo de hànbao
 McDonald’s ASSOC hamburger
 hamburgers from the McDonald’s
tā jiù shì bù
 3sg ADV COP NEG
 it’s just not
duì shēntǐ bù hǎo kěshì
 for body NEG good but
 not good for the body but
unb most zhōngwén zěnmē shuō
unb most Chinese how say
unb most how to say (this) in Chinese?
4. HB:
dàbùfēn
 most
 most
5. S: **dàbùfēn dē hànbao shì wǒ-**
 most ASSOC hamburger COP 1sg
 most hamburger are I -

- bú duì shēntǐ bù hǎo**
 NEG for body NEG good
 not not good for the health
6. HM: **dànshì chī hànǎo**
 but eat hamburger
 but hamburgers
cài tài shǎo le
 vegetable too few CRS
 have too few vegetables
7. S: **ubuh**
8. HM: **ròu**
 meat
 meat
tā lǐmiàn jiùshì
 3sg inside ADV:COP
 it only has
liǎng piàn miànbāo
 two piece bread
 two pieces of bread
zhōngjiān jiā le yīdiǎnr cài
 middle add PFV few vegetable
 add few vegetables in the middle
jiā le liǎng céng ròu
 add PFV two layer meat
 and two layers of meat
9. S: **ubuh**
10. HM: **cài tài shǎo le**
 vegetable too few CRS
 too few vegetables
wǒmen jiù xíguàn chī
 1pl ADV used:to eat
 we are just used to eating
en bǐjiào duō de cài
 INT relatively many NOM vegetable
 unh relatively more vegetables
měi yī dùn fàn ròu chī de shǎo
 every one CLF meal meat eat CSC little
 every meal we eat little meat
dànshì cài dǎo chī de duō
 but vegetable instead eat CSC many
 but a lot of vegetables

In this case, Sam nominated the topic of the healthful hamburger, attempting to convince HM that her perspective represented an overgeneralization and that variations on the hamburger exist. HM's response is to reject Sam's assertion, explaining that hamburgers contain too much meat and too few vegetables. In Chinese culture, like in many others, a significant theme is the belief that food and medi-

cine share the same roots, and one aspect of this relationship is the proper balance of meat and vegetables (e.g., Liu, 2011). Thus, in this case, although Sam was unable to defend the hamburger, we see HM offering him a concrete example which she relates to a principle of Chinese food culture.

4. Conclusion

In this study, both host families adopted a “two-way enrichment” approach (Iino, 2006), interpreting the homestay as offering opportunities for learning by everyone involved. In both cases, the focal students became very much engaged in the routine communicative practices of their hosts, participating in socializing encounters to the extent that their language proficiency permitted. Although his speaking ability was limited, David nevertheless developed the ability to participate in situational humour indexing intimacy. His experience speaks to the emotional dimension of study abroad. Forming close relationships with local people is, after all, an important first step toward understanding these people and mastering their communicative resources. Although these kinds of relationships are certainly documented for older participants (e.g. in the case studies of Kinginger, 2008, or Jackson, 2008), there are also many stories of misunderstandings and failure to reach common ground. We wonder if David’s experience illustrates how younger students’ willingness to be integrated into host families, along with the families’ own protective stance, may increase the likelihood that homestays will succeed as contexts for language learning. For Sam, because of his more advanced proficiency and his hosts’ attentiveness, the homestay also offered many opportunities for language socialization, that is, integrated learning of language and culture. His hosts took the time to provide developmentally sensitive assistance as he learned to talk about food, and also explained to him how they viewed the relationship between food and much broader cultural, aesthetic, moral, and health-related concepts.

The limitations of this study are multiple and diverse. Many themes beyond intimacy and taste may be explored in the data we have transcribed so far, and more will no doubt emerge as we examine the data from the other ten participants and their hosts. To minimize the intrusion and disruption involved in the data collection, we elected to record on the audio channel only, and this both limits the interpretability of the data and excludes analysis of gesture, gaze, eye-contact and other crucial, non-verbal features of communication. Perhaps most importantly, the length of the programme under study limits our ability to trace the longitudinal effects of students’ participation to the microgenetic level. Our focus on the particular compromises both trustworthiness and generalizability. We do not (yet) know how representative the data presented here will be in comparison to those of the other participants. However, this limitation is also a strength. In response to criti-

cism of qualitative approaches and their failure to generalize, van Lier (2005) once argued that *particularization* can also be a virtue of research. If qualitative accounts are read with interpretive acumen and sensitivity to the transferability of their findings from one context to another, they can yield useful and durable insights. In fact, for study abroad, the results of more macrolevel research, including the near-universal findings about significant individual differences, could be profitably supplemented, and perhaps interpreted, by examining what happens, in particular, when language learners go abroad.

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Appendix A

The following conventions are adopted in transcribing the interactional data. For detailed descriptions of transcription system, please refer to Du Bois, Schuetze-Coburn, Cumming, & Paolino (1993).

-	truncated word
:	speaker identity/turn start
?	appeal
()	vocal noises
(H)	inhalation
<@ @>	laugh quality
(())	researcher's comment

Appendix B

Grammatical Glosses

ADV	adverb
ASP	aspect
CLF	classifier
COP	copula
CRS	current relevant state
INT	interjection
NEG	negative
NOM	nominalizer
POSS	possessive
PRT	particle