Pragmatic development in Chinese speakers' L2 English refusals

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This study investigates the effect of learning environment (study abroad vs. at home) on the pragmatic development of Chinese speakers' L2 English refusals. A total of 20 Chinese Study Abroad (SA) students participated in the study and their L2 refusals were examined over the course of one academic year. These refusals were compared with those of 20 Chinese At Home (AH) students. Data were collected three times by an 8-situation Multimedia Elicitation Task. The results revealed that the SA students' overall frequency of opt-outs remained consistent throughout a year's stay in the L2 community but the study abroad experience influenced their choices sociopragmatically. Regarding repertoire of refusal strategies and that of refusal adjuncts, both groups demonstrated significant development, thus indicating no significant benefit of study abroad in these respects. The findings reveal the complexity of L2 pragmatic development and the importance of longitudinal investigations in such research.

Introduction

The last two decades have witnessed a rapid development of pragmatics studies in second language (L2) acquisition research (e.g., Alcón Soler and Martinez Flor 2008; Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford 2005; Kasper and Blum-Kulka 1993; Kasper and Rose 2002). L2 pragmatics research is generally referred to as interlanguage pragmatics (ILP), which studies "nonnative speakers' use and acquisition of L2 pragmatic knowledge" (Kasper and Rose 1999: 81). ILP has been criticized due to the tendency

of many studies to focus on L2 use rather than L2 learning (Bardovi-Harlig 1999; Barron and Warga 2007; Kasper and Rose 2002; Kasper and Schmidt 1996). A trend towards an increase in developmental studies has been observed in the last decade (Barron and Warga 2007) since Kasper and Schmidt's (1996) seminal paper.

Among such acquisitional ILP studies, however, only a few studies (e.g., Barron 2003; Hoffman-Hicks 1999; Schauer 2009; Woodfield 2011) have traced the development of learners' L2 pragmatic competence longitudinally, although one of the most promising means of examining pragmatic development is through research involving longitudinal studies (Kasper and Rose 2002; Taguchi 2010). Many ILP studies have investigated the development of L2 pragmatic competence cross-sectionally, focusing on either the effect of L2 proficiency (e.g., Hill 1997; Rose 2000, 2009) or the length of residence in the L2 community (e.g., Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1986; Cheng 2005; Félix-Brasdefer 2004).

The limited number of longitudinal studies in ILP reveals an important area of research yet to be undertaken (Bardovi-Harlig 1999; Kasper and Rose 2002; Ortega and Byrnes 2008). This study aims to contribute to the present literature on L2 pragmatics, by investigating longitudinally the impact of learning environment on the L2 pragmatic development of two groups of adult Chinese speakers of English in two contexts, first, in a Study Abroad (hereafter SA) context in which they attended higher educational institutions in an English-speaking country, and second an At Home (henceforth AH) context in which they attended higher educational institutions in their native country where English is a major or a language medium for instruction.

The article is organized as follows. Section 2 defines the speech act of refusal, sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics, and reviews recent longitudinal research on L2 speech acts realizations. Section 3 introduces the design and procedures of this

study. The results and discussion are presented in sections 4 and 5 respectively, followed by the conclusion in section 6.

Literature Review

Defining refusals

A refusal is generally considered as a speech act by which a speaker "denies to engage in an action proposed by the interlocutor" (Chen et al. 1995: 121). It represents one type of dispreferred speech acts (Eslami 2010; Félix-Brasdefer 2008b), which can be characterized as a response to another act (requests, invitations, suggestion and offers), rather than as an act initiated by the speaker. In order not to offend the interlocutor, a speaker needs to pay attention to the situational factors such as social status, social distance and imposition of the speech act (Brown and Levinson 1987) in order to achieve a satisfying outcome.

Sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics

Different aspects of pragmatics have been distinguished. The well-accepted classification is a distinction between sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics (Leech 1983; Thomas 1983). Sociopragmatics is "the sociological interface of pragmatics" (Leech 1983: 10). It addresses the relationship between linguistic actions and social constraints, concerned with "the social perceptions underlying participants' interpretation and performance of communicative action" (Kasper and Rose 2001: 3). Pragmalinguistics, on the other hand, accounts for "the more linguistic end of pragmatics" (Leech 1983: 11). It addresses the relationship between linguistic forms and their functions, involving "resources for conveying communicative acts and interpersonal meanings" (Dewaele 2007: 165).

Longitudinal studies on speech acts

This section reviews studies on L2 speech acts realizations, which employ a longitudinal design. To date, although L2 pragmatics research focuses mainly on the investigation of speech acts (Kasper and Dahl 1991), only a few speech acts have been examined longitudinally. The most frequently examined speech act is probably requests (Achiba 2003; Ellis 1992; Schauer 2004, 2009; Woodfield 2011). Other speech acts investigated longitudinally include apologies (Warga and Schölmberger 2007), greetings and compliments (Hoffman-Hicks 1999), offers (Barron 2003), and suggestions (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford 1993, 1996). Among these longitudinal studies, few have investigated refusals, with the exception of Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993, 1996) and Barron (2003). The review will be arranged in terms of the speech act investigated, starting from studies involving requests.

Ellis (1992) reported a longitudinal study investigating the pragmatic development of two teenagers who were at almost complete beginner level of English as L2 in a classroom context over 16 and 21 months respectively. Field-notes were employed to elicit data, supplemented with audio-recorded classroom conversations. By the end of the study, the two learners both produced fewer verbless requests; they systematically extended the range of request types; and they systematically extended the range of exponents of specific request types. However, both learners failed to develop the full range of request types. With respect to modification, the use of modification did not appear to increase over time. There were few instances of either internal or external modification in their requests even at the end of the study. When the learners did employ modifications, they relied primarily on internal rather than external

modification. Most of the modifications consisted of the use of 'please' and a few grounders. Both learners did not systematically vary their use of request types or forms according to addressee (e.g., no distinction was made between adult and peer as a hearer), which demonstrated that they still lacked sociopragmatic competence even at the end of the study. Ellis postulates that restricted learning opportunities and limited target language exposure may be the factors in the development patterns observed.

Similar to Ellis (1992), Achiba (2003) examined the acquisition of requests in a child learner of L2 English. She observed her seven-year-old daughter, Yao, from the onset of her L2 acquisition, over a 17-month sojourn in Australia in a social context. Data were collected by audio- and video- recordings of Yao's spontaneous requests in play situations, supplemented by diary keeping. Over the 17 months, Yao's L2 English request strategies and modifications developed steadily. Her requests moved from initially formulaic and routinized forms (e.g., mood derivable request strategies) to those progressively more differentiated (e.g., query preparatory request strategies). Her use of internal lexical/phrasal modifiers doubled while her use of external modification in the form of supportive moves appeared to develop more slowly. However, her modifier use did not show a linear increase relative to her rising proficiency in her L2. In addition, the patterns of Yao's request realization differed substantially according to goal, with the differences in addressees being remarkably less influential.

While the above two studies were based on naturally occurring data, a number of different methods have been used to elicit experimental data. Using the Multimedia Elicitation Task (MET), Schauer (2004, 2009) examined the pragmatic development of nine German university students' L2 English requests during their study abroad.

Data were collected three times over the period of one academic year. The research found that the study abroad experience played a positive role in learners' L2 pragmatic development. Similar to Ellis (1992) and Achiba (2003), the first months of the learners' sojourn facilitated more the initial use of direct request strategies, while in the subsequent months the learners continued to employ more indirect request strategies. The SA learners, at the end of their study abroad stage, had a broader repertoire of request strategies than their AH counterparts. All learners were observed to increase their repertoire of modification devices during the sojourn to some extent. However, several internal modifiers (e.g., consultation devices, imposition minimizers, and tag questions) remained underdeveloped and the degree of progress was negligible.

Woodfield (2011) investigated the pragmatic development of eight graduate students in their L2 English requests modification over an eight-month period in a British university. Data were collected at three points during the learners' sojourn by role-plays. The students' pragmatic development was compared with data from eight native English speaker graduate students' requests. Overall a linear decrease was found in the frequency of internal modification in learners' requests across the three phases representing divergence from native speaker norms. The overall frequency of external modification in the learner data closely approximated native speakers at each phase of the study. Regarding external modifiers, the study suggests that while certain external modifiers (such as Grounders and Alerters) had begun to approximate native speaker levels at the onset of graduate study in the target language community, other modification devices (such as the Appreciator) may take longer to acquire. Regarding internal modification, none of the eight learners employed the full range of

modification devices in phase 1 although all learners had acquired one or more internal modifier in subsequent phases.

Unlike the above studies investigating requests, Warga and Schölmberger (2007) explored the development of apologies of seven Austrian learners of French during a 10-month stay in Montreal. Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) were employed six times for the learners at a 2-month interval (the last time after their return to Austria) and once for the two native speaker (NS) groups: NSs of Quebecois French and NSs of Austrian German. Residence in the L2 community was demonstrated to trigger important developments in the learners' L2 pragmatic competence. While some of these developments led to an increasingly L2-like pragmatic competence, not all changes over the year abroad necessarily represent developments towards the L2 norm. In addition, learners' acquisition of pragmalinguistic forms remained largely unchanged. To be specific, three types of developmental patterns were shown to exist in the study: 1. towards the NS norm; 2. away from the NS norm; 3. a lack of development. In addition, most features investigated have been found to develop in a non-linear, rather than linear, manner.

In a further study employing a DCT, Hoffman-Hicks (1999) reported the pragmatic development of 14 American French students' greetings, leaving takings, and compliments in the study abroad environment over 16 months. The study also included 25 native French speakers and ten American French AH students, as the native and non-native control groups. Although both the experimental and the nonnative control groups were found to remain very non-target-like in their pragmatic competence in many ways, the SA group clearly made some gains that the AH group did not make. For example, in leaving taking, the SA students began to include

appropriate routine formulae even within a very short time after their arrival in France, whereas the AH students continued to produce non-formulaic, overlong expressions. Moreover, from early on, the SA students started adjusting their sociopragmatic behavior by complimenting and greeting less, while the AH group persisted in employing a positively polite interactional style.

One of the earliest longitudinal studies on refusals was by Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993, 1996), in which they investigated ten advanced adult nonnative English learners' pragmatic competence in suggestions and rejections in advising sessions. The data were compared to those of six native speakers. The research adopted a pretest-posttest design, with the time differences between the two sessions ranging from seven to 14 weeks. The findings indicated that the nonnative speakers developed their pragmatic competence in regard to choice of speech act and content, although these learners evidenced fewer changes in their ability to employ appropriate forms (Warga and Schölmberger 2007). The learners showed changes in their ability to employ appropriate speech acts by initiating more suggestions and fewer rejections. When they employed rejections, they rejected more directly and explicitly, which was considered more eligible in advising sessions. The learners' lack of progress at micro-levels was explained by lack of a sufficient range and emphasis of relevant status-appropriate input (Ellis 1992), perceived stereotypes of the target language or speakers by the learners, and the level of learners' own pragmatic or grammatical competence.

Barron's (2003) longitudinal study of refusals was designed to investigate the L2 pragmatic development of 33 Irish learners of German in their German requests, offers and refusals to offers. A group of 27 Irish English native speakers and a group

of 34 German native speakers were also recruited to provide both L1 and L2 native baseline data. A Free Discourse Completion Task (FDCT) was employed to elicit speech act data, which required respondents to write both sides of an open role-play or dialogue. The learner data were sampled on three occasions, that is, prior to, at the middle and end of a 10-month stay abroad sojourn in Germany, while the two native speakers groups were sampled once. The findings indicated that overall the sojourn in the target speech community resulted in some important developments in the learners' L2 pragmatic competence. However, it is also evidenced that not all change necessarily represented developments towards the L2 norm, reflecting a non-linear path in the learners' L2 pragmatic development (Achiba 2003; Warga and Schölmberger 2007; Woodfield 2011). Although the frequency of syntactic downgrading in the learners' data changed over time, these changes were comparatively minor and situation-dependent.

As reviewed above, the majority of ILP studies (e.g., Barron 2003; Schauer 2009; Woodfield 2011) compare learners' data with that of native speakers, which is considered as the baseline, to check if the learners can reach the 'L2 native norm'. This 'native norm model' in L2 pragmatics has been criticized by many scholars (e.g., Dewaele 2007; Mori 2009; Yates 2010) and challenged by empirical findings (e.g., Barron 2003; Xu 2009). Firstly, the problem relates to the concept of 'native', in that whose norm shall represent as the L2 native norm (Davies 2004; Roever 2011; Yates 2010) since native speakers differ along the lines of socio-economic status, ethnicity, age, gender, education and so on. Secondly, L2 learners' deviations from the 'native speaker norm' are not necessarily examples of pragmatic failure (Dewaele 2007; Siegal 1996). Some pragmatic deviations can be viewed as "charming and cute" in a

particular situation (Iino 2006: 158). Thirdly, there is little empirical support for the assumption that L2 learners seek to achieve ‘native-like competence’, which has been assumed in L2 pragmatics literature (LoCastro 2001). L2 learners may present degrees of resistance to conforming to the native speakers’ usages and intentionally diverge from the ‘L2 pragmatic norms’ (Barron 2003; Ishihara and Tarone 2009; LoCastro 2001; Siegal 1996). Finally, it has been evidenced that native speakers’ interpretation of L2 learners’ performance may differ from that of a native speaker (Hassall 2004). Maximal convergence to native speakers may not be judged appropriately by the native interlocutors (Cook 2001; Dewaele 2008). Acknowledging the aforementioned problems, researchers have to question, is it ethical to judge L2 learners according to the ‘native’ pragmatic norm (Ortega 2005)?

In addition, the longitudinal studies on L2 speech acts realizations available in ILP literature, to date, adopt a pre- and posttest design or a quasi-experimental design, which usually measured the experimental group twice or three times (except Warga and Schölmberger, 2007). Few investigates the AH students more than once, with the exception of Hoffman-Hicks (1999). Most ILP studies take the assumption that L2 speakers’ pragmatic competence in an AH context will remain static. This assumption needs closer investigation, as with spread of globalization and access to Internet, students in an AH context can also have access to resources which may promote their L2 pragmatic development (Xu 2009). Without comparison with an AH control group, “it is impossible to say with any certainty whether the effects were due to the stay in the target community” (Kasper and Rose 2002: 225).

Indeed, Rodriguez (2001) compared a group of North American students of Spanish with students who continued their Spanish classes in the US to investigate the effect of a semester in Spain on their L2 pragmatic competence. It was found that

both groups improved their L2 pragmatic assessment abilities on the post-test. No difference was found between the SA and the AH groups. This study, then, shows no advantage at all for the SA students. If the AH students had only been measured once, its findings would be different and not 'unique' (Kasper and Rose 2002: 225) in ILP literature. These findings demonstrate the importance of including a longitudinal investigation of a nonnative contrast group "to more clearly examine and appreciate the effects of the target environment on the acquisition of pragmatic competence" (Hoffman-Hicks 1999: 259).

Moreover, the above review indicates that, with the exception of Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993, 1996) and Barron (2003), longitudinal research focusing on refusals has yet to be explored. Even these two studies only focus on one type of refusals (e.g., refusals to suggestions in Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford 1993, 1996; refusals to offers in Barron 2003). To my knowledge, no longitudinal studies to date have investigated refusals to different speech acts (e.g., to requests, to invitations). Furthermore, the vast majority of L2 pragmatics studies are those that include learners with a European language or Japanese as their L1. Yet few longitudinal ILP studies to date have explored Chinese English learners' pragmatic development.

The Study

Research questions

This study adopts the multi-competence view in SLA (Cook 2002), treating the Chinese students as L2 users, defined after Cook (1992, 2002) as any person who uses a second language for a real-life purpose. The study, therefore, aims to depict how the Chinese SA students' L2 English refusals develop throughout the year, rather than comparing their usages with a group of native speakers. The SA students' responses

will be further compared with their AH counterparts to examine whether the developments, if any, benefit from the study abroad experience. Specifically, the study investigates whether there are differences in the choices of opt-outs and in the development of repertoire of L2 English refusals between Chinese SA students and AH students. The research questions are:

a) To what extent does study abroad affect Chinese English students' choice of opt-outs?
b) To what extent does study abroad affect Chinese English students' repertoire of refusal strategies?
c) To what extent does study abroad affect Chinese English students' repertoire of adjuncts to refusals?

Participants

Twenty Chinese graduate students studying in a university in the UK (SA learners) provided data for the investigation into learners' L2 pragmatic development in the SA context, whereas a contrast group of 20 Chinese AH graduate students studying in a university in east China were recruited to provide data for comparison. The age of the SA students ranged from 22 to 31, with an average age of 24.95; the age of the AH students ranged from 22 to 26, with an average age of 24.05. The average length of prior formal study of English was 12.20 years for the SA students, ranging from 10 to 17 years; while that of AH students was 11.95 years, ranging from 10 to 14 years. All the SA students had taken IELTS, and their results ranged from 5.5 to 7 (mean = 6.35, SD = 0.52); while all the AH students had taken TEM 8 (Test for English Majors, Band 8, the highest national English test in Mainland China, of which the full mark is 100) in the last year of their undergraduate study, and their results ranged from 60 to

72 (mean = 65.55, SD = 4.21). That is to say, in the present study, the English proficiency of both the SA students and the AH students were rather advanced.

The SA students majored variously, including TESOL, Law, Engineering, Management; the AH students were all majored in English Language and Literature. The reason that all the AH students were recruited from English Language and Literature was to match the AH group and the SA group with regard to academic (e.g., year of study, previous L2 level) and affective profile (e.g., motivational level) (Rees and Klapper 2008). None of the students had lived in an English speaking country before participating in this study.

Both the SA and AH students volunteered for the study. Although no financial compensation was given to the students, there was a 100% completion rate for all the three phases of data collection.

Instrument

Data were collected with the Multimedia Elicitation Tasks (MET) that the researcher developed for this study. The MET is a computer-based multimedia discourse completion task (Schauer 2004, 2009) in which participants are asked to sit down in front of a computer, watch a series of slides, listen to instructions and initiating utterances specifically recorded and respond orally. The MET includes eight experiment scenarios, all focusing on refusals. Each MET scenario contains two slides: an introductory slide (Figure 1) that briefly describes the actual situation, and an actual conversation slide (Figure 2) that provides the participants with audiovisual information in the form of a photographic image depicting the situation of the conversation, an audio conversation as well as a written subtitle of the conversation. The scenarios were randomly ordered in each administration to reduce the potential of

a memory effect by using the same material three times in a year with the same participants. There was no time pressure during the MET.

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The introductory slide is included to offer participants the background information of the context (e.g., the relationship between the interlocutor and them, the general context of the conversation) in which the conversation will occur. It only sets the context in which participants are expected to refuse, whereas no explicit 'refuse' appear in the introductory slide. Therefore it does not force the participants to refuse. In other words, participants have the right to opt out (Bonikowka 1988). In the actual slide, the photograph provides them vivid visual information of the interlocutor that can help them depict the interlocutor; the audio-recorded conversation makes the communication more natural; and the written subtitles for the conversation helps the participants understand the utterances because inability to catch and comprehend the initial utterances may affect participants' production and may cause a validity problem to the data collection. In order to ensure that the conversations would be natural and easily understood by the participants, three experienced English native

speakers who had worked on similar applied linguistics projects before and one experienced Chinese student who was studying PhD in Applied Linguistics at the time of data collection were recruited.

Similar to the DCT, the MET shares the advantages of the DCT such as the possibility to collect a large amount of comparable data, being easy to administer, and having the guarantee of standardization which addresses one of the disadvantages of role-plays but a crucial issue for longitudinal L2 pragmatics study (Schauer 2009). As role-plays are usually conducted in dyads (Kasper 2008), most commonly a learner and a second person, it is important for the researcher to ensure that the data have been collected "under comparable circumstances without the interference of factors such as changes in the second person's mood or tone of voice" (Schauer 2009: 79). However, it is impractical for the present study to recruit the same interlocutors to elicit role-plays with both SA learners and AH learners for a whole academic year. Thus the MET is designed to provide equal conditions for every participant, with an attempt to control for factors such as the interlocutor's mood or tone of voice by standardizing the audio-visual input through a computerized presentation format. Such standardization is critical in a study of this type where learners' production must be compared with itself over time. Additionally, the MET can provide the participants more context clues (e.g., the image of the interlocutor) than the DCT which increase the degree of naturalness (Félix-Brasdefer 2010).

Although it is possible that the MET does not produce data that are representative of actual language use in real interaction, it suffices the need of the present study because it does provide information regarding participants' pragmatic competence with respect to the production of English refusals, and as such can be employed as a measure of changes in knowledge that might be indicative of development. After all,

the focus of the study is not the participants' *on-line* pragmatic use in actual face-to-face interaction, but their *off-line* pragmatic competence – what they know about the pragmatics of English (Roever 2004; Rose 2009) – for which the MET is a valid and reliable instrument, regardless of whether the data yielded are representative of face-to-face interaction.

The eight refusal situations were designed to cover the four types of refusals, i.e., refusals to requests, to suggestions, to invitations, and to offers, with two in each type. Within each type of refusals, the description of each refusal situation was based on the social status of the interlocutor over the speaker, a professor-student situation (+P) and a student-student situation (-P), illustrated in the following:

S1: Your tutor asks you to give a presentation while you are busy. [Presentation: request, +P]

S2: Your classmate asks to borrow your notes while you need them too. [Notes: request, -P]

S3: Your tutor invites you to a farewell party however you are unable to attend. [Farewell: invitation, +P]

S4: Your classmate asks you to have a dinner at a restaurant but your budget is tight. [Restaurant: invitation, -P]

S5: Your tutor suggests that you choose an optional course whereas you prefer to take another course. [Course: suggestion, +P]

S6: Your classmate suggests you skip class to go to a movie. [Movie: suggestion, -P]

S7: Your tutor offers you a piece of cake in a social event but you don't like the flavour. [Social event: offer, +P]

S8: Your classmate offers you a piece of cake at lunch but you are already full.

[Lunch: offer, -P]

Data collection procedure

Data were elicited from both the SA group and the AH group three times in the academic year 2009/10. Because some of the SA students were required to join a pre-sessional English course while the others were not, those who were required for such a course arrived at the UK earlier than those who were not. Thus for the SA learners, the first data were collected in August/September 2009, within the first month of their arrival in the UK, according to the time they arrived. The second data were gathered approximately four months later in January 2010, and the third time in May/June 2010, over another four months approximately. The data collection for the AH group followed the same procedure as that of the SA group: the first time in October 2009, the second in March 2010, and the third time in June 2010.

Coding of refusals

The responses collected were first analyzed according to whether the participant chose to refuse. If a participant chose to accept the initial speech act, the response was coded as ‘opt-out’, e.g., ‘*Congratulations. I will be there. Thanks for inviting me*.’ If the participant chose to refuse, the refusal was then analyzed in terms of refusal strategies (pragmatic strategies which in the given contexts carry the force of a refusal) and adjuncts to refusals (pragmatic strategies which modify the refusal but do not in themselves carry refusing force).

The existence of a well thought out, well-defined classification system for refusals enables researchers to produce comparable analyses and results that are

expressed in terms of the same categories. This is an advantage that has been put to use in recent research (e.g., Chen et al. 1995; Liao and Bresnahan 1996; Nelson et al. 2002). Therefore, the study adopts Beebe et al.'s (1990) taxonomy, a widely accepted classification system in studies of refusals, wherever the description of their categories is able to accommodate adequately the refusals in the present study. However, Beebe et al.'s (1990) taxonomy is based on written data. Certain sections of participants' utterances in the present study could not be coded according to their coding scheme whereas some strategies in their classification were not observed in the present study. Therefore, some modifications are made to accommodate refusals elicited in the present study.

With regard to refusal strategies, first, strategies included in Beebe et al. (1990) but not observed in the present study are deleted, such as 'Performative' in direct refusals and 'Nonverbal avoidance', 'Statement of principle' and 'Statement of philosophy' in indirect refusals. Second, strategies like 'Request for additional information' (Félix-Brasdefer 2008a) and 'Conditional acceptance' (Liao 1994) are added. Third, strategies such as 'Postponement', 'Indefinite reply' and 'Repetition of part of previous discourse' are singled out as a category instead of subcategories in Beebe et al.'s (1990) taxonomy.

Regarding categories of adjuncts to refusals, following Félix-Brasdefer (2008a), the adjuncts 'agreement' and 'positive opinion' are singled out as a category instead of a combined category 'statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement' in Beebe et al.'s (1990) taxonomy. In addition, 'preparator' is added to the classification of adjuncts to refusals in the present study. Although 'preparator' is coded as an indirect refusal in Félix-Brasdefer (2008a), it is categorized as an adjunct to refusals in the present study, because in the present data set, the utterances of 'preparator' do not

carry the refusing force (see the example below).

The following examples illustrate the types of refusal strategies and adjuncts to refusals employed by the participants in this study.

I. Direct Refusals:

a. Direct No: e.g., *No.*

b. Negative ability: e.g., *I can't make it.*

II. Indirect Refusals:

a. Reason/Explanation: e.g., *I need it, too.*

b. Postponement: e.g., *Is it possible I do it next time?*

c. Apology/Regret: e.g., *I am sorry.*

d. Alternative: e.g., *You could ask someone else.*

e. Request for additional information: e.g., *Which movie?*

f. Attempt to dissuade the interlocutor

   a. Negative consequence: e.g., *I thought I will ruin your plan with my presentation with little preparation.*

   b. Criticize: e.g., *Last time I tried to borrow your notebook, why didn't you lend it to me?*

   c. Let interlocutor off the hook: e.g., *Don't worry*; *That's ok*.

   d. Request for empathy: e.g., *I hope you can understand*.

g. Conditional acceptance: e.g., *If you really need it, I can go.*

h. Indefinite reply: e.g., *I don't know if I can come to your party.*

i. Repetition of part of previous discourse: e.g., *Tomorrow?*

j. Promise: e.g., *I will help you if I can.*

k. Wish: e.g., *I wish I could help*.

Adjuncts to Refusals:

a) Statement of positive opinion: e.g., *That's a good idea*.

b) Willingness: e.g., *I'd love to go*.

c) Agreement: e.g., *Yes/Ok*.

d) Statement of empathy: e.g., *I know it's quit important for you to prepare exam.*

e) Preparator: e.g., *I'll be honest with you.*

f) Gratitude: e.g., *Thank you for your invitation.*

Data analysis

All the data were coded by the researcher, and then 15% of the participants' responses randomly chosen from each group (SA vs. AH) in each phase of data collection were coded by a second researcher. The inter-coder reliability was high (Cohen's K= 0.84), and the two coders discussed the disagreements and reached a complete agreement on all the coding. The initial descriptive quantitative analysis was carried out to show the similarities and differences existing in the responses within each group across the three phases of data collection and between the two groups in each data collection. In cases where it was desired to examine if the difference was significant, mixed repeated-Measures ANOVA was employed to study the effect of the nominal independent variable or the between factor (learning environment: SA vs. AH) on the dependent variable within successive measurements or the within factor (three phases of data collection). If a significant effect was found, post hoc tests using the Bonferroni correction were employed, in order to detect the location of the differences. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS), version 19.0. For all analyses the alpha level was set at .05.

Prior to the inferential statistical analyses, underlying assumptions such as normal distribution and homogeneity of variance were checked for all the dependent variables by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and the Levene's test respectively. It was found that assumption of normal distribution was violated. However, as Field (2009: 360) suggests, the F-statistic in ANOVA can be "quite robust to violations of normality *when group sizes are equal*" (emphasis in original). In the present study, both the SA group and the AH group had the same number of participants in each phase of the data collection. Therefore, mixed repeated-Measures ANOVA was employed in the present study without transformation of the original data.

Findings

Frequency of opt-outs

In this study, participants were granted freedom to opt out. They could choose to accept the initial request (or invitation, suggestion, and offer), if they were willing to. Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics of opt-outs in the students' responses in each phase of the data collection.

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As shown in Table 1, in terms of overall frequency of opt-outs, the SA students were quite consistent across the three phases of data collection: in Phase 1, among all the 160 responses, 17 were opt-outs (10.63%); in Phase 2, 16 were opt-outs (10 %), and in Phase 3, 17 were opt-outs (10.63%). In contrast, the overall frequency of the

AH students' opt-outs decreased across the three phases of data collection: in Phase 1, 19 were opt-outs (11.88%); in Phase 2, 13 were opt-outs (8.13%), and in Phase 3, 11 were opt-outs (6.88%).

An investigation into the SA students' opt-outs in each situation of the MET revealed that the SA students chose to opt out most frequently in the [Social Event] situation (Offer, +P). Eight of the 20 SA students (40%) chose to accept the offer in Phase 1; six (30%) in Phase 2, and seven (35%) in Phase 3. The results reflect that even if the SA participant did not like the pineapple cake offered by the lecturer (+P), as described in the MET scenario [Social Event], they tended to accept the offer. In contrast, the AH students chose to opt out most often in the [Movie] situation (Suggestion, -P). Eight of the 20 AH students (40%) chose to accept the classmate's (-P) suggestion to skip the seminar for a movie in Phase 1, although the number declined to six (30%) in Phase 2 and in Phase 3. The results reflect that even if going to the movie meant they had to skip a seminar, as described in the MET scenario [Movie], the AH students tended to accept the suggestion.

Repertoire of refusal strategies

This section analyzes the repertoire of refusal strategies in the Chinese students' L2 English data. Table 2 shows the repertoire of refusal strategies of the SA group and the AH group across the three phases of data collection.

@@@@@Put Table 2 about here@@@@@

As the results indicate, the average range of refusal strategy types employed by the SA students in Phase 1 was 5.30 (SD = 1.22). Sixteen of the SA students (80%) employed new types of refusal strategies in Phase 2, and the average range of refusal strategy types employed by the SA students in Phase 2 was 6.60 (SD = 1.39). At the end of the study, in Phase 3, eleven of the SA students (55%) employed new types of refusal strategies, and the average range of refusal strategy types employed by the SA students in Phase 3 was 7.40 (SD = 1.14).

On the other hand, the average range of refusal strategy types employed by the AH students in Phase 1 was 5 (SD = 1.26). Seventeen of the AH students (85%) employed new types of refusal strategies in Phase 2, and the average range of refusal strategy types employed by the AH students in Phase 2 was 6.30 (SD = 1.63). Six AH students (30%) employed new types of refusals strategies in Phase 3 and the average range of refusal strategy types employed by the AH students in Phase 3 was 6.85 (SD = 1.53). Thus, it appeared that the SA students and the AH students showed a similar profile with respect to the development of repertoire of refusal strategies.

The mixed repeated-Measures ANOVA indicated no main effect of the learning environment ($F(1, 38) = 1.11$, $p = .30$) but a main effect of time ($F(2, 76) = 79.88$, $p < .001$) on the participant's repertoire of refusal strategies. There was no significant interaction effect between the learning environment and time on the participants' repertoire of refusal strategies ($F(2, 76) = 0.85$, $p = .43$). Thus, it could be concluded that both the SA students and the AH students developed significantly across the three phases of data collection, and the two groups (SA and AH) were similar with respect to the development of repertoire of refusal strategies.

In order to detect the location of differences, post hoc tests using the Bonferroni correction were employed in both groups' data separately. The results revealed a

significant difference between all the contrasts in each group: the increase from Phase 1 to Phase 2 ($p < .001$ for both groups), the increase from Phase 2 to Phase 3 ($p = .001$ and $p = .047$ for the SA group and the AH group respectively), and also the increase from Phase 1 to Phase 3 ($p < .001$ for both groups). It can be concluded, therefore, that regarding the repertoire of refusal strategies, both the SA group and the AH group developed significantly during each phase of the study.

Repertoire of adjuncts

This section analyzes the repertoire of adjuncts to refusals in this study. Table 3 shows the repertoire of adjuncts to refusals of the SA group and the AH group across the three phases of data collection.

@@@@@Put Table 3 about here@@@@@

As indicated in Table 3, the repertoire of adjuncts in the SA students' data was 3.05 on average (SD = 0.94) in Phase 1. The most striking difference between the repertoire of adjuncts and that of refusal strategies is that in Phase 2, while 80% SA students (n = 16) employed new types of refusal strategies (see Table 2), only 40% SA students (n = 8) employed new types of refusal adjuncts. The average range of refusal adjunct types employed by the SA students in Phase 2 was 3.60 (SD = 1.05). In Phase 3, six of the SA students (30%) employed new types of refusal adjuncts and the average range of refusal adjunct types employed by the SA students in Phase 3 was 3.95 (SD = 0.89).

In contrast, the repertoire of adjuncts to refusals in the AH students' data was 3.00 on average (SD = 1.03) in Phase 1. Twelve of the AH students (60%) employed new types of refusals adjuncts in Phase 2 and the average range of refusal adjunct types employed by the AH students in Phase 2 was 3.75 (SD = 0.64). Seven of the AH students (35%) employed new types of refusal adjuncts in Phase 3 and the average range of refusal adjunct types employed by the AH students in Phase 3 was 4.10 (SD = 0.72). Thus, it appeared that the SA students and the AH students showed a similar profile with respect to the development of repertoire of refusal adjuncts.

The mixed repeated-Measures ANOVA indicated no main effect of the learning environment ($F(1, 38) = 0.12$, $p = .73$) but a main effect of time ($F(1.44, 54.53) = 29.58$, $p < .001$) on the participant's repertoire of refusal adjuncts. There was no significant interaction effect between the learning environment and time on the participants' repertoire of refusal adjuncts ($F(1.44, 54.53) = 0.38$, $p = .61$). Thus, it could be concluded that both the SA students and the AH students developed significantly across the three phases of data collection and the two groups (SA vs. AH) were similar with respect to the development of repertoire of adjuncts to refusals.

In order to detect the location of differences, post hoc tests using the Bonferroni correction were employed in both groups' data separately. The results revealed a significant difference between all the contrasts in both groups: the increase from Phase 1 to Phase 2 ($p = .02$ for the SA group and $p < .01$ for the AH group), the increase from Phase 2 to Phase 3 ($p = .046$ and $p = .01$ for the SA group and the AH group respectively), and also the increase from Phase 1 to Phase 3 ($p = .001$ for both the SA and the AH groups). It can be concluded, therefore, that regarding the repertoire of refusal adjuncts, both the SA students and the AH students developed significantly during each phase of the study.

Discussion

The study was designed to investigate the effect of learning environment (study abroad vs. at home) on Chinese students' L2 English refusals, in order to explore similarities and differences in the L2 pragmatic development between Chinese SA students and AH students. The following sections will discuss the findings related to the research questions.

Sociopragmatic development

The first research question examined the effect of study abroad on the Chinese SA students' sociopragmatic choices, with respect to their decisions whether to refuse in a given context. The findings revealed a rather consistent profile of the SA students' opt-outs across the three data collections: at the beginning of the study, 10.63% of the SA students chose to opt out; four months later, 10% chose to opt out and at the end of the study, 11.25% chose to opt out. It appears that one year's study abroad did not change the overall frequency of the SA students' opt-outs in this study.

However, the divergences of frequency of opt-outs in different situations between the SA and the AH groups demonstrated the possible impact of the study abroad experience. The study abroad experience might have influenced the Chinese SA students' L2 sociopragmatic behavior, as the SA students chose to opt-out most frequently in the situation of refusing an offer from a high status interlocutor, whereas the AH students chose to opt-out most frequently in the situation of refusing a suggestion from an equal status interlocutor. A similar effect of study abroad was reported by Hoffman-Hicks (1999). In this later study, Hoffman-Hicks observed that from early on, the American SA students started adjusting their sociopragmatic

behavior by complementing and greeting less whereas the American AH students persisted in employing a positive polite interactional style (Brown and Levinson 1987).

What is intriguing here is that the influence of study abroad in learners' sociopragmatic behavior, as indicated in the divergences of frequency of opt-outs among different situations between the SA students and the AH students, was even evident in the first phase of data collection, which took place within the first month of the SA students' arrival in the L2 community. This finding echoes previous findings in the L2 pragmatics literature that the effect of study abroad on the development of SA students' pragmatic competence may occur in the early stage of their study abroad (Hoffman-Hicks 1999; Matsumura 2001; Schauer 2009).

Pragmalinguistic development

The research questions 2 and 3 aimed to explore the extent to which study abroad affected students' pragmalinguistic competence, in terms of repertoire of refusal strategies and that of refusal adjuncts. The findings demonstrated that both the SA students and the AH students employed new types of refusal strategies and adjuncts to refusals across the three phases of data collection and the differences between each two phases of data collection was significant (between Phase 1 and Phase 2, between Phase 2 and Phase 3, and between Phase 1 and Phase 3) in both groups.

The findings demonstrated that the SA students' pragmalinguistic repertoire of L2 English refusal strategies and adjuncts to refusals developed significantly during the present study, and the effect was even significant between Phase 1 and Phase 2. This indicates that the SA students' L2 English pragmalinguistic competence developed significantly after a year's study in the UK, in terms of the range of refusal

strategies types and adjuncts types. Even after four months' study in the L2 community, they had already acquired significantly more types of refusal strategies and adjuncts in their L2 refusals. These findings are in tandem with previous findings from longitudinal request studies such as Schauer (2004, 2009) and Woodfield (2011) in which the SA students were found to acquire new forms of request strategies or modifications during their study abroad.

However, concerning the repertoire of refusal strategies and adjuncts, it cannot be concluded that the SA students' pragmalinguistic development was due to the learning environment of study abroad alone. It was evidenced that the AH students' pragmalinguistic repertoire of L2 English refusal strategies and adjuncts developed significantly during the study as well. The two groups of participants (SA vs. AH) developed in a similar pattern regarding repertoire of refusal strategies and adjuncts. No significant difference was found quantitatively in each phase of data collection between the two groups. This indicates no advantage for the SA students with respect to the development of the repertoire of refusal strategies and adjuncts, echoing previous findings such as Rodriguez (2001) and Xu (2009), in which both the SA group and the AH group displayed similar development of pragmatic perception of speech acts.

Although SA students and AH students may have different opportunities in terms of exposure to L2 target input, the evidence from the present study suggests that the learning environment does not necessarily influence the amount of L2 input available. With the help of English films or other materials, AH students' L2 pragmatic competence, particularly their L2 pragmalinguistic competence, may also develop (Rose 2001), given exposure to pragmatic input for learning. For example, retrospective data from the AH students in Xu's (2009) study revealed that the AH

learners did acquire input from other sources, such as watching movies, to make up for the shortage of live experiences in the L2 in their daily life. These findings indicate that AH students' pragmatic competence may also develop, suggesting that the AH students' L2 pragmatic competence should be examined across different points in longitudinal L2 pragmatics research as well.

Conclusion

The study has analyzed the effect of learning environment (SA vs. AH) on the pragmatic development of Chinese students' L2 English refusals. A total of 20 Chinese SA students were investigated for an academic year, with a comparison of 20 Chinese AH students. Data were collected three times by an 8-situation MET. The responses were analyzed in terms of choice of opt-outs, repertoire of refusal strategies and that of adjuncts to refusals.

The results revealed that the SA students were consistent in their choice of opt-outs throughout the study-abroad year. However, concerning individual situations, the SA students chose to opt-out most frequently in response to a lecturer's offer in a social event even if they did not like it, whereas the AH students chose to opt-out most frequently in response to a peer's suggestion for a movie even if it collided with a seminar. This revealed that the study abroad sojourn did influence the SA students' sociopragmatic choice of speech act (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford 1993, 1996). Regarding the repertoire of refusal strategies and that of refusal adjuncts, both the SA group and the AH group developed significantly in their L2 pragmalinguistic competence. There was no significant benefit of study abroad in these respects.

Although one of the most promising means of examining pragmatic development is through research involving longitudinal studies, only a few studies have traced the

development of learners' L2 pragmatic competence employing longitudinal data. The current study contributes to L2 longitudinal pragmatics research by investigating Chinese students' L2 English refusals. In addition, methodologically, the study traced both SA students and AH students longitudinally, to more clearly examine the effects of study abroad on students' pragmatic development. Indeed, without the detailed comparisons, some developments might be attributed to the benefit of study abroad alone, even if it may not be the case.

Rather than focusing on advanced learners' pragmatic development, future research is needed to investigate learners over a wider range of L2 proficiency levels (low, intermediate and advanced), academic levels and residential environments (e.g., student accommodation, home stay). In addition, future research should incorporate more pragmatic aspects, for example more speech acts over multiple turns, to provide a comprehensive insight into the development of learners' L2 pragmatic competence.

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Table 1. Frequency of opt-outs over time by scenario

Situation	*SA students (n=20)*			*AH students (n=20)*		
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Presentation	3	2	4	2	1	0
Notes	2	0	0	2	1	1
Farewell	1	1	1	1	0	0
Restaurant	0	0	0	2	0	0
Course	0	1	1	1	0	0
Movie	2	2	1	8	6	6
Social event	8	6	7	3	3	2
Lunch	1	4	3	0	2	2
Total	*17*	*16*	*17*	*19*	*13*	*11*

Notes:
The initiating speech act and social status in each situation:
Presentation (request, +P); Notes (request, -P); Farewell (invitation, +P);
Restaurant (invitation, +P); Course (suggestion, +P); Movie (suggestion, -P);
Social event (offer, +P); Lunch (offer, -P).

Table 2. Summary of descriptive statistics on repertoire of refusal strategies of the SA group and the AH group

		No. of students	*Mean*	*SD*	*Min*	*Max*
SA	Phase 1	-	5.30	1.22	3	8
	Phase 2	16	6.60	1.39	4	9
	Phase 3	11	7.40	1.14	6	9
AH	Phase 1	-	5.00	1.26	3	7
	Phase 2	17	6.30	1.63	4	9
	Phase 3	6	6.85	1.53	4	10

Note:
'No. of students' refers to the number of students who employed new types of refusal strategies in the two subsequent phases of data collection.

Table 3. Summary of descriptive statistics on repertoire of refusal adjuncts of the SA group and the AH group

		No. of students	*Mean*	*SD*	*Min*	*Max*
SA	Phase 1	-	3.05	0.94	1	5
	Phase 2	8	3.60	1.05	1	5
	Phase 3	6	3.95	0.89	2	6
AH	Phase 1	-	3.00	1.03	0	4
	Phase 2	12	3.75	0.64	3	5
	Phase 3	7	4.10	0.72	3	5

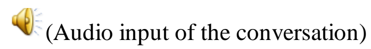
Note:
'No. of students' refers to the number of students who employed new types of refusal adjuncts in the two subsequent phases of data collection.

Figure 1. Introductory slide for Scenario1

Scenario 1

You meet your course tutor, Dr. Mary White, after class in the corridor of your department. She asks you to give a presentation in next Wednesday's seminar. You really have many other things to do at the moment and you don't have enough time to prepare for the presentation.

Figure 2. Actual scenario slide for Scenario1



Hi, we need more presenters for our seminar next

Wednesday. I hope that you can give a presentation.