Negotiation of Chinese Learners' Social Class Identities in Their English Language Learning Journeys in Britain

Feng GAO

Beijing International Studies University, China.
Email: gaofengfern@yahoo.com

Abstract:

The present ethnographic case study investigates how Chinese learners' social class identities are expressed and negotiated through their English language learning journeys in Britain. Drawing on a variety of sources (ethnographic observations, informal conversations and narrative interviews), the analysis focuses on the Chinese learners' self-identification of their family socioeconomic status, their class structured interaction opportunities, and the display and reconstruction of their social class identities both in language classroom context and in other various social contexts. This study is valuable, because (a) it offers insights into the situations and needs of the privileged students studying abroad; (b) it is an advance on studies which treat social class as a social variable of determining the use and learning of a second language; and (c) it raises a fundamental question of second language teaching — whether the language teacher should put more energy into educating for responsibility besides educating for success.

Key Words: social class identity, second language learning, Chinese learners, study abroad, privilege

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been increasing research on the relationship between identity and language learning. Identity has gained footing in the second language learning field, and has become a research area in its own right (Zuengler and Miller, 2006). Researchers from various fields have brought diverse perspectives to our understanding of the relationship between second language learning and social identities (e.g. McKay and Wong, 1996; Norton, 2000; Miller, 2003; Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005). However, little attention has been paid to social class identity in the general field of second language research. Addressing this gap in research, this article explores the links between Chinese learners' social class identities and their English language learning and living experiences in Britain.

According to a senior official at the Education Section of the UK Embassy in Beijing, there were around 60,000 Chinese students studying in the UK in 2007 (China Daily, 2007). Most Chinese students studying in the UK are from middle and upper-class families, who benefit from the economic development in China (Shen, 2005). Since the ability to study English abroad is often a function of income, the issue of social class ought to be one of central concerns of second language learning scholars, but in fact it has been seldom discussed either in second language learning literature or in study abroad literature. This article focuses on the Chinese learners, who travel from the People's Republic of China, a communist country where social class distinctions are underdiscussed, to the UK, a capitalist country in which the notions of superiority and inferiority have a long historical legacy (Devine, 2005). I suspect that the national differences in social class structures might stimulate the Chinese learners to revalue their socioeconomic status. Then, I want to explore how these Chinese learners' privileged social status affect their English learning and living experiences in Britain; and how their social class identities are shaped by their everyday experiences in the classroom and outside the classroom. In the following section, I will briefly review research in second language learning that examines learners' social class identities. Then, I will conceptualise social class identity in this article.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Review of studies on social class identity and second language learning

Collins (2006) argues that the lack of reference to social class in second language learning literature does not mean that class processes are absent from these studies, instead, they are omnipresent, but referred as 'power relations' or 'transformative practices' indirectly (p. 4). After striking review of second language learning publications, I found only a few studies which mentioned social class directly. Even when second language learning scholars discuss social class, they pay unbalanced attention to second language learners: firstly, they generally focus on the students from lower social classes rather than students from middle classes and upper classes; secondly, they generally interest in the minority and/or immigrant students

instead of students studying abroad (see, for instance, Heller, 2001; Goldstein, 2001). Therefore, only the needs of underprivileged students have been documented and addressed. Furthermore, some of these studies treat social class as a fixed position within a social structure and a social variable, which determines the learning and use of a second language. For example, in Goldstein's (2001) study, 25 out of 26 Portuguese immigrant women could not access formal ESL instruction because of the gendered structure and dynamics of the Portuguese family, and the class positions they held within the Canadian political economy.

From a poststructuralist perspective, Kubota (2003) suggests that social class should not be treated as a fixed category, as class gets constructed by social practices and discourses, and people with certain socioeconomic status get positioned or position themselves in learning and using a second language. Collins (2006) also argues that social class, as a feature of identity, is a sense of self in relation to others, and thus should be explored as a process with ethnographic orientation. Within this thread, Heller (2001), for example, conducted an ethnographic study in a single French-language minority high school in the Toronto area. She found that the reproduction of gender and social class ideologies in the bilingual school, which relegated females, gays and lesbians, and working-class students to the margins of public spaces, ensured the reproduction of heterosexual, middle-class male control over the definition of ideologies of ethnicity and language. Thus the students would become imbued with ideologies of heterosexual middle-class masculinity.

Applying this poststructuralist approach, this article considers: (a) social class identity needs to be studied as socially and culturally constructed, as dynamic and subject to change, and as always context dependent; (b) there are no second language learning behaviour, practices or styles that can be universally associated with a particular social class group; and (c) second language learners' social class identities are reinforced, challenged, or (re)produced during their second language learning processes.

B. The conseptulisation of social class identity

In this section, I turn to explain my understanding of social class identity. Nowadays, a popular argument in both the social sciences and political debate is that the 'old' certainties of social class have been eroded: there has been a move from occupation to consumption patterns as sources of social distinction (Mackintosh and Mooney, 2004). Bourdieu (1986) sees occupational class and consumption influences on social class identity in an interrelated way. Similarly, Connell et al. (1982: 33) state that 'it is not what people are, or even what they own, so much as what they do with their resources' is central to understand their class identities. This suggests that social class should not be considered only in terms of one's income and occupation, but in terms of one's cultural practices.

Since cultural practices are seen to be central to contemporary class identity formation, the cultural dimensions of class analysis provide the researcher a useful tool for exploring issues of social class in second language learning field. Skeggs (2005) argues that culture can be

converted into a highly mobile commodity, and has become a central site for the exchange of values, therefore, cultural practices are seen to be central to contemporary class formation, and how culture is deployed as an economic resource shapes our understanding of class. Social class is being increasingly defined as a cultural property of the person, in relation to their attitudes and practices. On the one hand, social class identities shape people's cultural values and lifestyle practices in everyday life; on the other hand, the context of people's everyday lived experience constructs their social class identities, values and lifestyles (Devine, 2005). Social class identity is 'produced in specific sets of social, historical and economic relations of power, which are reinforced and reproduced in everyday social encounters' (Norton, 2000: 13). In other words, the relationship between individuals and social class is about a system of relationship between people, rather than a system of categories. Following the culture turn, this present study focuses on the combination of having the resources and knowing how to use the resources to establish the social class identity.

On the basis of the proceeding discussion, this article treats social class as a shifting identity, and second language learning as part of the process of social class identity construction. The discussion of social class identity, therefore, focuses on the Chinese learners' lived experiences on social class, on how their social class identities shape the constraints they encounter and the opportunities they enjoy as well as how they, as active agents, shape their own lives in terms of their cultural values and lifestyle practices during their English language learning journeys in Britain.

3. METHOD

A. Data collection

Data used in this article is selected from a recent thirteen-month study of a group of Chinese learners studying in three language schools in Britain. The study set out to investigate how Chinese learners' identities influence their English language learning journeys in Britain, and how their identities may themselves be shaped by the English language learning discourse in the language classroom and outside the language classroom. The study employed ethnographic and case study approaches to gain an in-depth and holistic understanding of Chinese learners' English learning and living experiences in Britain. I primarily tracked six Chinese students for nine months, from their registration in long-term programmes in three language schools in the UK, until their completion of their programmes. Of the multiple sources of data collected for the original study, this article primarily draws on the following: classroom observation; observation of microcontexts of the language school and other social contexts outside the language school; talks with the six participants; phone conversations with the six participants; and final narrative interview with the six participants.

Detailed field notes were made during classroom observation, and significant discussions arising in the classroom were recorded and transcribed. In order to draw a holistic picture of my project, and to acknowledge the multiple levels of experiences which informed my participants'

everyday lives in Britain, I included data from different settings, such as the common rooms in the language schools, coffee shops, restaurants, and my house. Frequent informal face to face conversations in different settings, and phone conversations helped me gather the data on what was going on with their English language learning and lives outside the classroom. I hoped that these informal settings would facilitate the expression and analysis of personal and private experiences. At this level, I wanted the participants perceiving me as another Chinese student and a friend, or an elder sister. I did not want my role as researcher to dominate my relationship with the participants, as I thought this might create too much distance between us. It was for this reason that I did not use a digital recorder to record these informal conversations, but took notes immediately afterwards. The six follow-up narrative interviews were conducted mainly in Chinese and recorded by digital recorder for a period of roughly an hour and a half each. All the interviews were translated and transcribed from sound files into English by myself. I then asked a Chinese PhD student in our department to listen to the recordings and check some parts of the translation about which I felt uncertain.

B. Analysis

The data analysis was primarily inductive: I began the data analysis by coding all the transcripts and field notes with short phrases, which indicated the contents of pieces of data, and suggested the potential for developing categories. I then read through transcripts and field notes for multiple times, and categorised the data and identified certain recurring themes. Subsequently, I started to write up a comprehensive chapter on each participant, which would allow me to make cross-references across both historical time and social space. During the writing process, I reduced the many categorises to a number of themes, with coded data supported. Finally, I summarised the key themes, with coded data attached as supporting evidence, for all six participants. This allowed me to see the extent to which an issue is represented across cases, and to grasp common treads across cases. The key themes related to social class identities include: the participants' classifying their families; the impact of social class identity on their interaction opportunities in English; discussing social class issues in the language classroom; and constructing social class identities through consumption. Based on these themes, I developed the data sections.

C. The participants

The six primary participants were Jin, Zhu, Fan, Lan, Xu and Yin. They varied in age from 18 to 24, and three of them were female. All of them newly arrived in Britain, when they started to participate in this study. Jin, Zhu, Fan and Lan registered in a 36-week International Business Foundation Programme in the same class in a language school. Xu and Yin took a 10-month English language programme in two language schools respectively. All of them were born and grew up in Mainland China. As this article focuses on the six participants' social class identities, it might be worthy to introduce their parents' occupations here: Jin's father ran a business by himself, and his mother managed two restaurants and a hotel; Zhu's father was a land agent, and his mother worked as an accountant in his father's company; Fan's mother was running an

international business and her father worked for her mother as an assistant; Lan's father worked as a manager in a company, and her mother was a housewife; Xu's father was a senior local governor, and his mother worked as a registered accountant; and Yin's father worked as a vice general manager in a big vehicle company, and her mother had retired because of health problem. Furthermore, each participant has been given a pseudonym to protect their identity.

4. DATE DESCRIPTIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Self-identification of family class positions

I am aware that social class categories are identified differently in China and in Britain, so the participants' objective class locations (identified by external criteria) may be changed from China to Britain. However, this study is interested in the participants' own perceptions of their social class positions rather than their objective class locations, since objective class locations neither generate people's class identities nor sustain people's class practice (Devine, 2005). Moreover, how people identify their class positions might be various from person to person. Accordingly, I asked the participants to classify their families in the final interview. It seems that income and occupation are no more the only measures used to define one's social class, as the data shows that the resources the five participants' used to identify their families' social class status are quite diverse. Lan and Zhu considered themselves as middle class. The way that Lan defined her family class was unbelievably simple:

> F: Which class do you think your family belongs to?
>
> Lan: I think middle class.
>
> F: How do you get this idea?
>
> Lan: Because we are neither rich nor poor, we are in the middle. (Interview, 08/06/06)

For Lan, being middle class equalled with being economically average. Zhu also had a vague idea about which class his family belonged to, and he gave his assessment linked to his sister and his spending in Britain.

> F: Which class do you think your family belongs to?
>
> Zhu: Middle class.
>
> F: How can you get this idea?
>
> Zhu: I feel so. My elder sister has studied in the UK for several years, and I also study in the UK. In this year, my elder sister is going to do her master's degree, and I am going to do my bachelor's degree. My parents can support two children studying in the UK. So my family should belong to middle class. (Interview, 03/06/06)

The capability to finance two children studying in the UK was the evidence that Zhu used to categorise his family as middle class.

Yin and Fan used the label, 'upper middle class' to denote a high standard of living, which was higher than the average. Yin classified her family according to the materialistic resources of her family.

> F: Which class do you think your family belongs to?
>
> Yin: Upper middle class.
>
> F: How do you get this idea?
>
> Yin: At least, I needn't worry about food, dress, and I have money to study abroad, so my family at least belongs to upper middle class. (Interview, 14/05/06)

Unlike Yin, who classified her family only according to economic resources, Fan described her family background as upper middle class according to her mother's occupation, self-improvement, and values, which reflected her experience in the United States.

> I think my family belongs to upper middle class, because my mother has a company, and she has her own career. My mother always brings me some modern ideas. She stayed in the US for one year, so her ideas are very advanced, and more advanced than other parents. (Interview, 13/06/06)

Finally, Xu and Jin described themselves as upper class. Xu did not explain the reasons, because his parents had already divorced, and he was unwilling to talk about his broken family. On the contrary, Jin gave a detailed description of the social class status of his family.

> Jin: I think my family belongs to the upper class, according the money that my family can earn and the life quality. But my parents don't spend much money, we don't live in a big luxury house, and the cost of living is low. Some people buy big houses, change cars every day, or travel around very frequently. My parents don't do this. They save money compared to other upper-class people…
>
> F: How do you get the idea that your family belongs to upper class?
>
> Jin: Firstly, my family doesn't have any problems paying my study in the UK, and my parents have stable income. Although we live in the middle-class level, but our entire property reaches upper-class level.
>
> F: What do you mean by life quality?
>
> Jin: If my parents feel tired, they can go for holiday. They needn't worry about the bosses' opinions, as they run the business by themselves. They can eat wherever they want. My mother does yoga in the spare time to relax. The more relaxed you feel the better quality of life you have. (Interview, 27/05/06)

Jin emphasised that his parents did not countenance typically upper-class consumption in a way they might have done, but their income allowed them to have a comfortable lifestyle which would be counted as upper class. This extract also shows how cultural practices come to define social class (Skeggs, 2005). Jin classified his family not only according to direct economic issues (owning a house, running a company, stable income, supporting him studying abroad), but also to cultural practices (holidaying freely, eating out, practising yoga). According to Jin,

these were upper-class practices. The values that have been attached to each practice can be seen to be based on 'the right knowledge' (Skeggs, 2005: 50) — knowing to send the child studying abroad, to appreciate the relaxed style of life. The right knowledge here is also dependent upon economic resources.

In summary, the six participants distinguished their families between middle class, upper middle class and upper class, although in some respects, their discussions of their families' standard of living were barely distinguishable from each other. For instance, the capability to afford children studying abroad was the common reference for Zhu, Yin and Jin to identify their families' social class status. Since most of the participants seemed to lack consciousness or comprehensive understanding of class, there might be a gap between their objective class positions and their subjective class identifications. However, it is certain that all six participants came from affluent families with education aspirations, so they had the opportunities of studying English in Britain. This section suggests that the practice of learning a second language abroad is regarded as not only an evidence of classifying learners' family social status, but also a way of displaying their social class identities.

B. The impact of social class identity on interaction opportunities

During their English learning journeys in Britain, the participants' perceptions of their social class identities appear to influence their interaction opportunities. For example, the host family was the place where Jin had regular exposure to native English speakers outside the classroom, but he had limited conversation with one of his host families, mainly because of class difference, as he explained:

> The mother works as a cleaner from midnight 12:00 am to 8:00 am three days a week, and the father works in a railway station. They are lower class people, who don't have broad knowledge, so we have nothing to talk about. Not like the woman of the previous family I lived with, who belonged to upper class, and we could talk about many topics. (Talk with Jin, 24/10/05)

Jin chose to live in a host family instead of sharing a house with other students, because he wanted to practise speaking English with native English speakers. Although Jin was in an English environment, in contact with British people, the particular personalities of different host family members, and Jin's sense of the difference between upper class and lower class blocked his communication with the host family.

In another case, the difference of social class value contributes to Zhu's trouble interacting with his Russian classmate, Ivan, as it was evidenced in the following incident: before the class of 21/11/05, Ke, a female Chinese student, wanted to change her seat with Zhu.

> Ke: Zhu, can I exchange my seat with you, because I feel quite cold sitting here.
>
> Zhu: No, I don't want to sit next to Ivan.
>
> F: Why?

Zhu: He is very snobbish. He only likes rich people, and looks down upon poor people. (Observation, 21/11/05)

Zhu refused to do pair work with Ivan, and even when the teacher, Sandra, asked them to check the answers of a reading task together, Zhu insisted on doing the exercise alone. For Zhu, Ivan was a snob, and regarded himself as superior to people from lower classes. This perception had a bad influence on Zhu's participation in classroom activities.

These two examples suggest that the Chinese learners' social class identity may mediate their access to different interaction opportunities in English: Jin was not interested in communicating with his host family members, because of the difference in their social status; Zhu resisted speaking English with Ivan, because of the difference in their social class values.

C.   Discussing social class issues in the language classroom

After discussing how the Chinese learners' social class identities are expressed in their social interactions, I now turn to look at how their social class identities are expressed and negotiated in language classrooms. For example, in the class of 21/03/06, the students were required to listen to the tape recorder and read the text on 'Style — Ralph Lauren':

(Alda is a female British Filipino teacher; Mehmet is a male Turkish student; Sun is a female South Korean student.)

Alda: Do you know Ralph Lauren?

Mehmet: Yes.

Alda: Do you have the brand in Turkey?

Mehmet: Yes.

Alda: In Korea?

Sun: Yes, I bought clothes for my children there. It's quite expensive.

Alda: Do you have Ralph Lauren in China?

Xu: I don't know. (Observation, 21/03/06)

During the conversation, Xu became the only one who lacked the knowledge of Ralph Lauren, an American fashion brand. However, he could pick up the information about Ralph Lauren quickly from the teaching materials, his language teacher and his classmates to establish his middle-class taste.

In later class, Alda picked up the word 'upmarket', and explained it to the students.

Alda: Who is upmarket? The film star, like Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie. They buy a dress with 20, 000 pounds. Will I buy a dress for 20, 000 pounds? That means I have to work for 2 years to pay for it.

Students: No.

Alda: Some students with dad's credit card are also upmarket…

…

Alda: Who has been to New Bond Street?

Xu: Me.

Alda: What do they have there?

Xu: Every famous brand.

Alda: It's called a designer's street, an ultra fashionable place. Another part of London is also very expensive?

Xu: Oxford Road.

Alda: No, it's Sloane Street in Kensington. Princess Diana used to shop there. You can see rich ladies with little dogs in their handbags. (Observation, 21/03/06)

The information given by Alda and what Xu saw in New Bond Street helped to form a picture of upper-class people's shopping style. Neither the teacher nor the students made any comment on economic inequalities, which might imply that none of them questioned why the social inequalities were as they were and how they could be changed.

In another example, in the class of 31/10/05, the teacher, Sandra wrote 'poverty' and 'crime', and 'education' and 'crime' on the blackboard to illustrate the meaning and use of 'positive correlation' and 'negative correlation'.

(Sandra is a female English teacher.)

Sandra: What do you think of the relation between 'poverty' and 'crime'? Just guess the relation.

Lan: If you are poor, you tend to commit a crime.

Jin: Yes. (Fan nodded)

Sandra: So 'poverty' and 'crime' have a 'positive correlation'.

Zhu: Educated people have fewer probabilities to commit a crime.

Sandra: So 'education' and 'crime' have a 'negative correlation'. (Observation, 31/10/05)

I felt uneasy when I heard this conversation in the classroom, since no one disagreed with the 'positive correlation' between 'poverty' and 'crime'. Sandra's interpretation of the relationship between 'poverty' and 'crime' exemplifies the 'propertising of culture' (Skeggs, 2005: 64) in Britain — 'being poor becomes represented as a cultural deficiency, as individualised, as a problem of dispositions, of not being able to become the right person' (Skeggs, 2005: 64, citing Sayer,). All four Chinese students came from affluent families, so they probably felt comfortable in criticising poor people, who 'tend to commit a crime'. I wonder that it might be oversimplistic to address the 'positive correlation' between 'poverty' and 'crime' without mentioning other possibilities, or explaining the reasons. Moreover, the language teacher's opinions could influence the students in various ways, such as in this case, Sandra tended to

support the students' answers, and ignored the possibility that the students' answers might also be an example of class discrimination. In this lesson, the students might have had their biased beliefs confined, and take them as middle-class or upper-class appropriate attitudes. The lesson may have served to confirm their middle-class attitudes.

All the three examples presented in this section appear to focus on middle-class or upper-class culture and stance in Britain. I suspected an oversimplification of attitudes to class, since I failed to find any classroom discussion which addressed anything else but middle-class or upper-class culture in my field notes. It is possible that the language teacher might be constrained by their own social biases and the teaching materials, which only reflect middle-class values. These could lead language teachers to focus on middle-class culture, while overlooking the realities of social inequality. I would agree with Vandrick (2006), who advocates that second language instructors need to educate the privileged students to be analytic, critical and aware, and help them to understand their own privileged position, and its implications and consequent responsibilities. The profoundest question I want to make here may be the one of balancing the efforts to educate for success and to educate for responsibility.

D. Social class identity and consumption

Besides classroom interaction, the Chinese learners' social class identities are also displayed and negotiated in their consumption behaviour outside the language classroom. People's identities are influenced by what they consume, what they wear, and what commodities they buy (Sarup, 1996). Thus, consumption is significant in shaping social class identities. Consumption is a mode of being, and a way of gaining identity (Sarup, 1996), and this section will discuss how the participants change their consumption practices in Britain. The data suggests that the participants incline to spend more money on fashion to signify their social class identities. For example, Xu sought to gain prestige from shopping for the world famous brands. After he had been in Britain for three months, Xu only wore the clothes he had bought in London. During the break time on 28/02/06, he showed me his new Gucci necklace, which cost him 150 pounds.

> F: It's so expensive, but just looks fine, not amazing.

> Xu: I bought this one because of its brand. (Talk with Xu, 28/02/06)

It seems that Xu chose to buy the Gucci necklace, because of its 'sign value', the socially-constructed prestige value, rather than its 'use value', which is defined by the daily use and enjoyment (Sarup, 1996: 108). Since consumer societies are constituted by hierarchies of sign values, one's social standing and prestige are determined by where they stand within the system of consumption (Sarup, 1996). Gucci's relative prestige over other brands symbolised Xu's prestigious social standing. It is important to point out here that Xu developed his appetite for famous brands in Britain.

> F: You have been to New Bond Street. How did you feel about it?

Xu: I felt I was really poor. All the cars parking in the street are famous and luxury cars, such as Rolls Royce and Bentley. All the brands there are the top brands in the world. I had no idea about these famous brand clothes before I came to Britain. (Talk with Xu, 21/03/06)

Studying English in Britain provided Xu the opportunities to get familiar with the famous brands: he could learn the information about the brands in the language classroom as I discussed in the previous section; or he could see the brands in New Bond Street. Similar to Xu, Yin described how she started to become aware of fashion brands during her journey in Britain.

F: Do you spend more money on clothes in Britain or in China?

Yin: Of course, in Britain. Because the general price is higher here, and I also buy more expensive labels.

F: Why do you buy more expensive brand clothes?

Yin: When I was in China, I did not care about the brands. But when I came to Britain, the people around me frequently talked about the brands, and I saw the advertisements of the expensive brands on TV. If I go to the high street, I can see the chain shops of these brands again. So I started to buy them. (Call to Yin, 15/05/06)

Ironically, although the cost of clothes is generally more expensive in Britain than in China, Yin tended to buy more expensive labels to signify her social status. Furthermore, Yin's association with brands were influenced by her peer group, the media, and the shopping environment in Britain. Yin's rising awareness of brands may have contributed to her consciousness of her social class status.

One of the most important functions of dress is as a status signal, since the choice of dress often relates to the choice of images (Sarap, 1996). Accordingly, what the participants chose to wear may signify who they think they are. During their English learning journeys in Britain, the participants had increased their awareness of the symbolic values of brands and the link between the sign values and social class status, and they became more conscious of using commodities to indicate their privileged social status.

5. CONCLUSION

This article has offered a reading of the relationship between social class identity and second language learning, which has seldom been discussed in previous research (Collins, 2006). Moreover, the second language learning experiences of privileged students have not been documented as much as less privileged students, perhaps because researchers see the situations and needs of the affluent and secure are less serious compared to the poor and troubled. This article suggests that the English learning journey in Britain is a marker of social class in terms of the high cost of study abroad. All of the participants come from affluent families in China. Their social economic status and self-identified social class positions influences their

opportunities to practise English. The participants only attempt to communicate when their thoughts, beliefs and social class status are validated by others with whom they interact.

Subsequently, the participants' senses of their middle-class or upper-class identities were reinforced during their English language journeys in Britain. When they perceived new behaviour and attitudes associated with middle class or upper class in Britain, they tended to adjust themselves socioculturally. For example, Xu, Yin and Fan intended to spend more money on fashion. Influenced by language teachers, peer pressure, the media, and the social environment in Britain, the participants perceived that there was a link between social prestige and fashion. Thus, they chose to wear certain brands to signify their social class identities.

Finally, the data of this article suggests that the focus on middle-class culture in the language classroom should be called into question. I would suggest that international students should be encouraged to think critically; language teachers also need to think about the messages they are projecting, and to raise awareness of social classes and social inequalities in the content of published materials and their experiences. In this way, English language teaching will perhaps assist and inspire students to combine concern and compassion with critical thinking and analysis.

REFERENCES

Bourdieu, P. 1986. Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste. London: Routledge.

China Daily. 2007. UK gets second highest number of Chinese students.

[Retrieved April 21, 2008]. Available at   http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/6292972.html.

Collins, J. 2006. Where's class in second language learning? Working papers in urban   language & literacies.

Connell, R. W., Ashendon, D.J., Kessler, S., & Dowsett, G. W. 1982. Making the difference: Schools, families and social division. London: Allen & Unwin.

Devine, F. 2005. Middle-class identities in the United States. In F. Devine, M. Savage, J. Scott & R. Crompton (eds.), Rethinking class: Culture, identities and lifestyles. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 140-162.

Fox, K. 2004. Watching the English: The hidden rules of English behaviour. London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd.

Goldstein, T. 2001. Researching women's language practices in multilingual workplaces. In A. Pavlenko, A. Blackledge, I. Piller & M. Teutsch-Dwyer (eds.), Multilingualism, second language learning, and gender. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 77-101.

Heller, M. 2001. Gender and public space in a bilingual school. In A. Pavlenko, A. Blackledge, I. Piller & M. Teutsch-Dwyer (eds.), Multilingualism, second language learning, and gender. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 257-282.

Kubota, R. 2003. New approaches to gender, class, and race in second language writing. Journal of Second Language Writing, 12 (1), 31-47.

Mackintosh, M., & Mooney, G. 2004. Identity, inequality and social class. In K. Woodward (ed.), Questioning identity: Gender, class, nation. (2nd ed.). London: Routledge, 79-114.

McKay, S. L., & Wong, S-L. C. 1996. Multiple discourse, multiple identities: Investment and agency in second-language learning among Chinese adolescent immigrant students. Harvard Educational Review, 66 (3), 577-608.

Miller, J. 2003. Audible difference: ESL and social identity in schools. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Norton, B. 2000. Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity and educational change. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

Pavlenko, A. 2001. 'In the world of the tradition, I was unimagined': Negotiation of identities in cross-cultural autobiographies. The International Journal of Bilingualism, 5 (3), 317-344.

Pavlenko, A., & Blackledge, A. (eds.) 2004. Negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Pellegrino Aveni, V. 2005. Study abroad and second language use: Constructing the self. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sarup, M. 1993. An introductory guide to post-structuralism and postmodernism. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

Shen, W. 2005. A study on Chinese student migration in the United Kingdom. Asia Europe Journal, 3 (3), 429-436.

Skeggs, B. 2005. The re-branding of class: Propertising culture. In F. Devine, M. Savage, J. Scott & R. Crompton (eds.), Rethinking class: Culture, identities and lifestyles. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 46-68.

Vandrick, S. 2006, June. Students of the new global elite. Paper presented at the Conference of Cutting Edges: Classrooms, Cultures and People, Canterbury, UK.

Zuengler, J., & Miller, E. R. 2006. Cognitive and sociocultural perspectives: Two parallel SLA worlds? TESOL Quarterly, 40 (1), 35-58.