

## Beliefs and Out-of-class Language Learning of Chinese-speaking ESL Learners in Hong Kong

WU Man-fat, Manfred

Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (Haking Wong)

### Abstract

*Background:* There has been a lack of research on exploring how beliefs about language learning (BALLs) and out-of-class language-learning activities are related. BALLs and out-of-class language-learning activities play an important role in influencing the learning behaviours of learners and learning outcomes. Findings of this study provide useful pedagogical implications for English teaching in Hong Kong.

*Aim:* The aim of the study is to gather information on the BALLs and out-of-class language-learning activities of young adult ESL learners in Hong Kong.

*Sample:* Convenience sampling is adopted in this study of 324 ESL (English as a Second Language) learners undertaking vocational education in Hong Kong.

*Methods:* Surveys on BALLs and out-of-class language-learning activities

*Results:* Findings indicate that learners held mostly positive beliefs. Watching films and television, reading, listening to English songs, music and radio channels, formal learning and practising speaking with others were the out-of-class language-learning activities reported by subjects that they carried out most frequently. There is an association between BALLs and the implementation of activities. Learners who regarded out-of-class language-learning activities as useful were found to possess more positive beliefs regarding their English learning in terms of BALLI (Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory) items. Learners who implemented out-of-class language-learning activities were found to have more positive beliefs in terms of two factors, *Perceived value and nature of learning spoken English* and *Self-efficacy and expectation about learning English*.

*Conclusion:* The contextual influences of English being a prestigious language in Hong Kong and being attached with tangible rewards and power are suggested to contribute to the prevalence of instrumental motivation among ESL learners in Hong Kong. These influences, together with notion of modesty and the fear of losing face in Confucianism, also contribute to the popularity out-of-class activities related to receptive skills such as reading newspapers and watching TV rather than those involve productive skills such as face-to-face contacts and writing.

**Keywords:** Beliefs About Language-learning, Out-of-class Language-learning Activities, Chinese-speaking ESL Learners

## 學習觀念與課堂外語言學習關係

胡文發

香港專業教育學院（黃克競）

### 摘要

**背景：**學習觀念與課堂外語言學習活動，對語言學習都有影響。可是，這兩方面的研究一直很缺乏。本研究的結果，能對教學提供啟示。

**目的：**本研究目的，是搜集香港學生，對學習觀念和課堂外語言學習的看法。

**調查對象：**本研究取自便利樣本，調查對象為324個接受職業教育學生。

**調查方法：**採用量化方法，用問卷來搜集受訪者在學習觀念與課堂外語言學習活動的資料。

**調查結果：**結果顯示學生對語言學習持有正面的觀念。他們經常進行的課堂外語言學習活動包括看電影電視、閱讀、聽英文歌、聽英語電台、正式學習和跟他人練習。結果亦顯示，學習觀念與課堂外語言學習活動的進行，是有關係的。認為課堂外語言學習活動有用的學生，對語言學習持有較正面的觀念；而會進行課堂外語言學習活動的學生，亦認為英語會話比較重要，和對學習英語有較大信心和期望。

**總結：**本文提出，因為英語在香港是一個很有聲望，同時帶有物質回報和權力意義的語言，所以香港學生，很普遍會因為物質上的原因去學習英文。這些原因，加上在儒家思想中謙虛和保護個人面子的重要性，引致學生喜愛進行較被動的課堂外活動，例如閱讀報紙和看電視等，而不喜歡進行主動活動（例如和其他人用英語面談和寫作）的情況。

**關鍵詞：**學習觀念、課堂外語言學習活動、中文為母語的英語學生。

## Introduction

Compared to other individual learner differences in *TESOL* research, beliefs about language learning (BALLs) is a neglected area. Hosenfeld (1978) points out that language learners bring beliefs to their language classroom. BALLs have been found to influence many learning behaviours of ESL (English as a Second Language) learners, such as the choice of learning strategies (e.g., Yang, 1999) and self-regulation (Wenden, 1999). There have also been findings on the relationships between BALLs and ESL language achievement (e.g., Huang & Tsai, 2003; Mantle-Bromley, 1995; see also Ellis, 2008). Out-of-class language-learning activities has also been an under-researched area in *TESOL* research. Out-of-class language-learning activities have been found to be related to learner autonomy (Gao, 2009). As suggested by Nunan (1991), learners' application of their developing skills outside classroom is important in their second language development. They are important because they contribute greatly to ESL learning (Hyland, 2004).

The aim of this study is to gather information on the BALLs and out-of-class language-learning activities of young adult ESL learners in Hong Kong and to explore the relationships between BALLs and out-of-class language-learning activities as reported by learners.

There are three research questions in this study. They are given below:

1. *What are the BALLs of ESL learners in Hong Kong?*
2. *What are the out-of-class language-learning activities implemented by ESL learners in Hong Kong?*
3. *Is there an association between the BALLs and the implementation of out-of-class language-*

*learning activities among ESL learners in Hong Kong?*

The findings presented in this paper are part of a larger study focusing on comparing learners' and teachers' perspectives on BALLs, out-of-class language-learning activities and the relationships between BALLs and out-of-class language-learning activities.

The research hypothesis of this study is that there are positive relationships between BALLs and implementation of out-of-class language learning activities.

This article is divided into seven parts. After this introductory section, a literature review will be given. Section three focuses on methodology. Findings related to BALLs, out-of-class language-learning activities and the relationships between them will be given in section four, five and six respectively. Finally, a conclusion and recommendations for ESL teaching will be given in section seven.

## Review of Literature

### BALLs

Since Horwitz's (1985, 1987; 1988) framework was adopted in this study, this section will focus on more recent research employing her framework. Due to a limitation of space, the seminal research conducted by Horwitz (1985, 1987; 1988) will be omitted. Attention will be given to research conducted in the Chinese contexts.

Yang (1999) administered BALLI and SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) to 505 university students in Taiwan. Four dimensions were identified by factor analysis: *Self-efficacy and expectation about learning English, Perceived value and nature of learning spoken English, Beliefs about foreign language aptitude, and Beliefs about formal*

*structural studies.*

Wu (2008) administered BALLI at the same institution as this study, and found that there was a prevalence of the beliefs on foreign language aptitude among the subjects, despite the fact that many of the subjects did not regard themselves as having it. English was regarded as a language of medium difficulty. In order to learn to speak a language well, subjects regarded that one to two years was necessary if a person spent one hour a day learning the language. Vocational students in Hong Kong also perceived that the learning of vocabulary and grammar were important, regarded foreign language learning as different from the learning of other academic subjects, and regarded that it would be best to learn English in an English-speaking country. Excellent pronunciation, repetition, practising, guessing word meanings were highlighted by the subjects. Subjects of this study were also quite tolerant towards mistakes in speaking. Finally, a high level of instrumental motivation prevailed among subjects.

There are other previous findings that are related to BALLs in Hong Kong. Liu and Littlewood (1997) identified the instrumental motive of ESL learners in Hong Kong. In line with Lai (2001), they found Hong Kong ESL learners hold positive attitudes on their English learning.

### **Out-of-class Language-Learning Activities**

Research on out-of-class language learning conducted in Hong Kong will be the focus of this section.

Benson (2001), an advocate of out-of-class language learning, divides out-of-class learning into three types. The first type is self-instruction, which are the deliberate plans language learners carried

out to improve their target language, for example, reading grammar books to improve their grammar. The second type, naturalistic language learning, is more unintentional, with an example of engaging in discussions in the target language. The final type is self-directed naturalistic language learning, in which learners look for opportunities for learning a language, but do not intentionally focus on a particular aspect (e.g., grammar) while engaging in the activities.

In Hong Kong, Yap (1998) as well as Littlewood and Liu (1996) reported students' preference for receptive rather than productive activities. Similarly, Pill (2001) reported that his 15 adult Chinese-speaking ESL learners in Hong Kong engaged in receptive-skill activities such as listening and reading more often than face-to-face interactions. He found that they initiated a wide range of activities, and limited access to native speakers was the major contextual barrier to their English learning. The limited opportunities for practising English confirmed the earlier finding of Richards (1998), who reported that limited practice opportunities with native speakers and the negative feeling in speaking English with other native Cantonese speakers were the two major barriers for Chinese-speaking ESL learners in carrying out their out-of-class language-learning activities.

In another study conducted in Hong Kong, Hyland (2004) also found the popularity of activities related to receptive skills. Her findings indicate that much of the time of learners was spent on receptive skills in their 'private domain' such as listening and reading despite the ample opportunities available for practising productive skills in the 'public domain'. She concluded that there are two contextual factors for the avoidance of face-to-face contacts: the

implication that the use of English is an indication of social distance (or ‘showing off’) and the fear of negative judgement by the society. This conclusion is consistent with earlier suggestions of the impropriety of shining in front of one’s peer (Wong, 1984) and the importance of protecting one’s face (Bond, 1996). In line with Hyland (2004), Koo (1998) reported the popularity of watching English language television programmes among Chinese ESL learners in Hong Kong.

Liu and Littlewood (1997) explored the reasons for the reluctance of Hong Kong Chinese-speaking ESL learner to participate in classroom spoken interactions. They provided several reasons: lack of experience in speaking English, lack of confidence in spoken English, and a high level of anxiety in speaking because of high performance expectations. The final possible reason they suggest is a mismatch between teachers’ and students’ perceptions of learner role. While students perceived unplanned, spontaneous speech as the most important aspect of class participation, teachers viewed that raising comments and questions as the most important aspect.

In summary, the four representative studies on BALLs in the local Hong Kong context included in the last section are descriptive in nature. This feature of past research constituted an important motive for conducting this study, and it gave rise to Research Questions 3. In addition, past research on out-of-class language-learning activities introduced in this section shows that ESL learners in Hong Kong prefer activities more related to receptive skills such as listening and reading rather than face-to-face interaction.

## Methodology

### Subjects

Convenience sampling was adopted in this study. Eleven classes of students undertaking vocational educational education of about 30 students in each class were selected. The total sample size was 330.

In order to facilitate the interpretations of findings, it is necessary to introduce several socio-linguistic features of the Hong Kong society. In Hong Kong, despite the prestigious role of English since the colonial rule of the British government, Cantonese has been the linguistic vehicle for social cohesion (Lai, 2001). Most Hong Kong people do not have frequent contacts with foreigners (Pill, 2001, Richards, 1998). English is seldom used for intra-ethnic spoken communication. In classroom teaching, mixed code is common (Li, 2008). Speaking in English to each other is regarded as ‘showing off’ by local Chinese (Hyland, 2004; Pennington, 1994; Richards, 1998). For Hong Kong people English is attached with tangible rewards and power (Pang, 2003).

### Instruments and Procedures

The instrument for gathering quantitative data from learners employed in this study was a questionnaire in Chinese containing three sections. The first section was a Chinese-translated version of the 34-item BALLI<sup>1</sup> (Horwitz, 1987) designed for ESL students. This Chinese-translated version was employed in a previous study by Wu (2008) conducted at the same institute. The Cronbach’s alpha of .734 obtained in this study shows that the Chinese version of BALLI has satisfactory internal reliability, and is comparable with the value of .768 obtained by Wu (2008).

The second section of the questionnaire contains

separate items measuring out-of-class language-learning activities. Hyland's (2004) framework for measuring out-of-class language-learning activities was adopted in this study. Because almost forty percent of subjects (38.3%) were engaged in full time work, modifications were made. In this part of the survey questionnaire, respondents were requested to indicate a maximum of ten activities they carried out in English and to indicate the frequency of carrying out each activity in a Likert scale, from 1 ('Never') to 5 ('Very often'). Similarly, they were requested to write down a maximum of ten activities they regarded to be useful in improving their English and to indicate the degree of usefulness of each activity.

The final part of the student survey questionnaire contains items on the background information of research subjects.

There are in total 45 questions in the questionnaire.

The researcher administered the questionnaire to the 11 selected classes at the beginning of their English lessons, with the presence of their teachers. All the students agreed to complete the questionnaire, and were given approximately 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

SPSS was used for performing statistical analyses. Descriptive statistics on background information of subjects, BALLs and out-of-class language-learning activities were performed. The inferential statistic of t-test was used to explore the differences of BALLs between subjects who regarded out-of-class language-learning activities as useful and not useful. It is also conducted to determine the differences in BALLs between subjects who carried out and not carried out these activities. Finally, Pearson product-moment correlations were performed to determine the relationships between BALLs and out-of-class language-learning activities. The BALLI

items do not yield a composite score. As previous studies, a factor analysis on BALLI was performed, and the factors obtained were used for subsequent inferential statistics.

As for the data collected from semi open-ended items of the questionnaire, especially those relating to out-of-class language-learning activities, all the responses were listed. Then the responses were isolated into units of meaning and sorted into meaningful categories. The categories were put into tables. These procedures are suggested by Miles and Huberman (1984).

### **BALLs**

There are two parts in this section: learners' background information and the descriptive findings of BALLs. They are given below.

#### **Background information**

Out of a sample of 330, 324 learners participated in the survey. Among them, 124 (38.3%) were apprenticeship students, 200 (61.7%) were higher diploma students. Almost all the subjects were males (303, or 97.4%), and their mean age was 20.2 ( $SD = 6.56$ ). More than half of them (55%, or  $N = 155$ ) perceived their English proficiency to be poor, and 42.2% of them ( $N = 119$ ) perceived their English proficiency to be average. Almost all of them (97.2%) perceived their English proficiency to be either poor or average, and only one of them regarded his or her English to be very good. Despite subjects' self-perception of their poor English proficiency, most of them (94.7%, or  $N = 268$ ) regarded English as either important or very important. Subjects' perceived importance of English confirms the findings of Evans and Green (2001) of the privileged role of the English language in the Hong Kong society.

The common reasons given for the importance of English proficiency were instrumental ones such as career (52.0%), English as an international language (17.3%), and the need of the Hong Kong society (14.7%). This confirms the earlier findings such as Liu and Littlewood's (1997). Almost sixty percent (58.5%) of the subjects expressed their interests in learning English, which confirms the earlier finding of the positive attitudes ESL learners in Hong Kong hold on their English learning (e.g., Lai, 2001; Liu & Littlewood, 1997). The most frequently mentioned favourite experiences in English learning were related to communicating, speaking, understanding others, and making friends with foreigners. They were followed by watching films and television, listening to English, listening to English songs, learning vocabulary, and reading.

## **BALLs**

In order to answer the first research question of this study, '*What are the BALLs of ESL learners in Hong Kong?*' the descriptive patterns of BALLs based on the classification of Horwitz (1987) are given in this section. The descriptive statistics are given in Appendix A.

### **Foreign language aptitude.**

About seventy percent of the subjects either agreed or strongly agreed children are more talented in learning languages (72.8%, or 39.8%+33.0%), and some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages (70.9%, or 43.7%+27.2%). They did not believe that people who are good at mathematics or science are poor language learners, as 52% either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this view and 33.1% were neutral. They tended to be neutral in their beliefs that women are better language learners (41%) and someone who already speaks a

foreign language would find it easier to learn another language (38.9%). They were also neutral in the view that people who speak more than one language are very intelligent (38.9%). Finally, while they believed everyone can learn to speak a foreign language (62% either agreed or strongly agreed), they were neutral in the view that Hong Kong people are good language learners (48.8%), and were negative towards their own ability for learning foreign languages (64.2% either disagreed or strongly disagreed).

### **The difficulty of language learning.**

Half (51.7%, or 34.3%+17.4) of the subjects either agreed or strongly agreed that some languages are easier to learn than others, and English is a language of medium difficulty (49%). Most of them were neutral in their view that they would learn to speak English very well (45.4%), and it is easier to speak than understand a foreign language (42%). They were also neutral in the view that it is easier to read and write than to speak and understand English (37.7%). Finally, about one-third of them believed one hour a day for one to two years are needed for learning to speak a language well. Another one-third, however, believed that three to five years are needed for learning to speak a language well.

### **The nature of language learning.**

About half of the subjects either agreed or strongly agreed that learning a foreign language is a matter of learning vocabulary (53.7%, or 39.5%+14.2%), learning grammar (56.8%, or 42.9%+13.9%) and translation (50.6%, or 35.8%+14.8%). They also either agreed or strongly agreed that learning a foreign language is different from learning other academic subjects (57.3%, or 40.8%+16.5%), and it is best to learn English in an English-speaking country (62.2%, 32.8%+29.4%). Only about a third (35.2%) of them either agreed

or strongly agreed with the importance of culture learning in learning to speak English.

#### **Learning and communication strategies.**

Subjects endorsed the importance of excellent pronunciation in English speaking (with 62.7% of them either agreed or strongly agreed), guessing word meanings (52.6% either agreed or strongly agreed, or 36.5%+16.1%), repeating and practising (53.7% either agreed or strongly agreed, or 38.8%+14.9%). Almost half of them (47.7%) felt timid in speaking English with other people, and more than forty percent of them regarded the use of audio-visual materials as important. They did not agree with the negative view that one should not say anything in English until he or she can say it correctly (with 52.5% of them either disagreed or strongly disagreed). Almost forty percent of them (39.4%) enjoyed practising English with the people from English-speaking countries.

#### **Language learning motivations.**

A high level of motivation existed among the subjects: they would like to learn English well (77.8% either agreed or strongly agreed), and believed good English would allow them to find a better job (80.8% either agreed or strongly agreed). They also regarded English as important in Hong Kong (79% either agreed or strongly agreed). These findings are consistent with the information gathered relating to the background information of subjects. Subjects overwhelmingly agreed that knowledge of English allows them to get a good job. As ESL learners in a lot of monolingual contexts, proficiency in English in Hong Kong is essential for academic and career advancement. Therefore, consistent with earlier findings (Wu, 2008; Yang, 1999), subjects of this study had a high instrumental motivation.

Overall speaking, findings on BALLs of this

study confirm previous findings of studies conducted at the same institute by Wu (2008). BALLs reported by learners were mostly positive and are facilitative to their English learning. However, we should also remember that some of their beliefs do not facilitate or even hinder their language learning. Some examples are their over-optimistic view of the years needed for learning a foreign language and the belief that language learning is a matter of vocabulary learning, grammar learning, and translation. These beliefs might result in their frustrations and loss of confidence. However, compared to their counterparts in Wu's (2008) previous study, subjects of this study tended to be less motivated, were less confident in their ability and prospects of English learning, were less interested in making English-speaking friends, and put less emphasis on excellent pronunciation, repeating and practising. One possible reason is that subjects of the earlier study were students studying business administration, which is more competitive in admission. Therefore, with lower English proficiency, survey subjects of this study were less confident and less interested in learning English than their counterparts studying business administration. However, this interpretation remains to be confirmed.

### **Out-of-class Language-Learning Activities**

Findings presented in this section aim to answer the second research question, '*What are the out-of-class language-learning activities implemented by ESL learners in Hong Kong?*' Content analyses of the semi open-ended items on out-of-class language-learning activities resulted in 24 types of activities. These activities can be broadly classified into ten more general types. The frequency distribution of these activities is given in Table 1 below.

Table 1  
*Frequency Distribution of Out-of-class Language-learning Activities Implemented and Regarded as Useful for Improving English*

Types of activities	Activities carried out in English		Activities useful for improving English	
	N	%	N	%
<i>Using audio-visual means</i>				
1. Watching films, TV channels, news, drama and television series in English	139	28.8	55	19.5
<i>Reading</i>				
2. Reading English books, passages, novels, newspapers, and comics	101	21.0	43	15.2
<i>Listening</i>				
3. Listening to English songs / radio channels / music	53	11.0	13	4.6
4. Listening to English around me	3	.6	6	2.1
<i>Sub-total</i>	56	11.6	19	6.7
<i>Speaking</i>				
5. Making contacts with foreigners	36	7.5	64	22.7
6. Speaking with native teachers in school	1	.2	0	.0
7. Speaking English at home and with friends	5	1.0	16	5.7
<i>Sub-total</i>	42	8.7	80	28.4
<i>Surfing websites / playing computer games</i>				
8. Surfing websites in English	21	4.4	2	0.7
9. Playing computer games in English	19	3.9	9	3.2
<i>Sub-total</i>	40	8.3	7	3.9
<i>Writing</i>				
10. Writing	8	1.7	7	2.5
<i>Memorising / practising</i>				
11. Doing exercises and practising	10	2.1	8	2.8
12. Memorising (vocabulary, verbs), reading and memorising dictionary	14	2.9	19	6.7
13. Memorising and copying English	4	.8	0	.0
<i>Sub-total</i>	28	5.8	27	9.5
<i>Playing games / engaging in activities</i>				
14. Playing games in English	11	2.3	4	1.4
15. Engaging in activities that require the use of English	8	1.7	7	2.5
<i>Sub-total</i>	19	4.0	11	3.9
<i>Formal learning</i>				
16. Attending lessons, paying attention in lessons and revising lessons	8	1.7	17	6.0
17. Using English during lessons (any lesson)	0	.0	1	.4
18. Asking friends with better English to teach me	20	4.1	0	.0
19. Checking dictionary	11	2.3	6	2.1
20. Translating	2	.4	1	.4
21. Learning and listening to phonetics	1	.2	1	.4
22. Taking public examinations	1	.2	0	.0
<i>Sub-total</i>	35	8.9	26	9.3
<i>Others</i>				
23. Using English at work	5	1.0	1	.4
24. Knowing world culture	1	.2	2	.7
<i>Total</i>	482*	100	282*	100

*Note.* \* Because each individual participant could give a maximum of ten activities and some of them did not give any response to these two items, the total number of each type of activity varies. A total of 263 subjects gave a total of 482 responses to the item on the activities they implemented in English. A total of 282 activities were given by 187 subjects who gave responses to items on the activities which they thought could improve their English.

Table 1 above shows that the first three most popular activities of watching films and television, reading, and listening account for about sixty percent of the total number of activities implemented by learners. However, these receptive activities were not rated so highly in terms of their usefulness. Among the remaining activities, formal learning and speaking were the most popular. Although speaking was the most frequently mentioned activity reported by subjects as useful for improving English, it was relatively less frequently implemented. Attending lessons, paying attention in lessons, and revising lessons were another type of activity regarded to be useful but seldom implemented by subjects.

Concerning the usefulness of the activities, most of the respondents rated the 482 activities they carried out in English to be useful ('3'), in a Likert scale from 1 ('Not useful at all') to 5 ('Very useful'). Among these activities, doing writing and listening to phonetics are self-instruction activities; making contacts with foreigners is a naturalistic language-learning activity; finally watching films, television channels in English, listening to English songs and playing computer games in English are self-directed naturalistic language-learning activities (Benson, 2001). In the present study, self-directed naturalistic language-learning activities were found to have constituted the largest proportion of the activities implemented. Naturalistic language-learning activities, especially making face-to-face contacts with foreigners, despite being perceived as useful, were not frequently carried out.

The lack of popularity of naturalistic language-learning activities is possibly due to contextual factors described earlier. As most Hong Kong people, subjects of this study regarded English as having an important role in the Hong Kong society. Cantonese,

rather than English, is the linguistic vehicle for social cohesion in Hong Kong (Lai, 2001). Therefore, despite the prevalence of English in society, most Hong Kong people do not have frequent contacts with foreigners (e.g., Pill, 2001, Richards, 1998). It would be embarrassing for the local Chinese to talk to each other in English, as it might be viewed as 'showing off' (Hyland, 2004; Pennington, 1994; Richards, 1998). As mentioned in the literature review, shining in front of one's peer is regarded as improper in Confucianism (Wong, 1984) and there is prevalence of protecting one's 'face' (Bond, 1996) among Chinese. The fear that one might make mistakes in front of others is another possible reason for the unpopularity of speaking-related, or more high-risk activities among the subjects. The possibilities suggested by Liu and Littlewood (1997) are reflected by the finding on BALLs that almost half of the subjects felt timid in speaking English with other people. These are also the possible reasons for the gap between the perceived usefulness and actual implementation of speaking activities, no matter for naturalistic or self-directed naturalistic purposes.

The types of activities identified in this study confirm previous findings that activities that are passive in nature such as watching TV and reading are more popular (e.g., Hyland, 2004; Littlewood & Liu, 1996; Pill, 2001; Yap, 1998). The relatively lower perceived usefulness of the most popular activities implemented in English (using audio-visual means, reading, and listening) confirms the above finding. The popularity of watching English language television programmes confirms Koo's (1998) findings.

### Relationships Between BALLs and Out-of-class Language-learning Activities

Findings presented in this section aim to answer the last research question, ‘*Is there an association between the BALLs and the implementation of out-of-class language-learning activities among ESL learners in Hong Kong?*’

The exploratory factor analysis employing principal component analysis with Varimax rotation resulted in four factors, with a structure similar to Yang’s (1999) obtained in Taiwan. Therefore, Yang’s names for the factors were used. The four factors are *Perceived value and nature of learning spoken*

*English* (Variances explained: 15.2%), *Self-efficacy and expectation about learning English* (Variances explained: 9.79%), *Beliefs about foreign language aptitude* (Variances explained: 5.81%), and finally *Foreign language aptitude and the difficulty of language learning* (Variances explained: 4.36%). Altogether these four factors explained a total of 35.1% of the total variances. These four factors were used to perform subsequent inferential statistics.

Results of *t*-tests in exploring differences in the BALLs between subjects who regarded out-of-class language-learning activities as useful and not useful are given in Table 2 below.

Table 2

*Significant t-test results on the BALLs between learners who regarded out-of-class language-learning activities as useful and not useful*

BALLI items	Useful		Not useful		<i>t</i> <sup>1</sup>
	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)	N	
<b>Factor 1</b>					
<b><i>Perceived value and nature of learning spoken English</i></b>					
29. If I learn English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.	4.36 (.800)	245	4.02 (1.06)	46	2.02*
33. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.	3.84 (.985)	245	3.43 (1.07)	46	2.53*
13. I enjoy practising English with the people from English-speaking countries I meet.	3.36 (.985)	245	3.02 (1.08)	45	2.10*
Factor 1 as a whole					NS
<b>Factor 2</b>					
<b><i>Self-efficacy and expectation about learning English</i></b>					
5. I believe that I will learn to speak English very well.	2.89 (.898)	245	2.48 (.937)	46	2.80**
16. I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	2.28 (.867)	245	2.00 (.816)	46	2.04*
Factor 2 as a whole					NS

Note. <sup>1</sup>: Based on the results of Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances.

No significant differences were found between subjects who perceived out-of-class language-learning activities as useful and not useful in terms of the four BALLI factors obtained in earlier statistical

analyses. However, significant differences were found in several BALLI items. Students who perceived out-of-class language-learning activities as useful tended to endorse more the statement that ‘Everyone

can learn to speak a foreign language', and believed that they had a special ability for learning foreign language. At the same time, they believed they would learn English well, enjoyed practising English with people from English-speaking countries, and believed

they would find a better job with good English.

Significant differences between students who implemented and not implemented out-of-class language-learning activities are summarised in Table 3 below.

Table 3

*Significant t-test results on the BALLs between learners who implemented and not implemented out-of-class language-learning activities*

BALLI items	Implemented		Not implemented		t <sup>1</sup>
	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)	N	
<b>Factor 1</b>	57.9		54.9		
<b>Perceived value and nature of learning spoken English</b>	(7.14)	94	(7.97)	173	3.10**
31. I want to learn to speak English well.	4.43 (.789)	97	4.14 (.889)	181	2.69**
29. If I learn English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.	4.44 (.816)	97	4.22 (.860)	181	2.09*
32. I would like to have friends from English-speaking countries.	4.06 (.922)	97	3.61 (.954)	180	3.80***
24. I would like to learn English so that I can get to know people from English-speaking countries better.	3.48 (.894)	96	3.06 (.958)	178	3.52**
33. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.	4.07 (1.02)	97	3.56 (.968)	181	4.09***
26. It is important to practice with audio-visual materials.	3.54 (.936)	97	3.24 (.899)	180	2.59*
23. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.	3.77 (.835)	97	3.50 (.911)	181	2.54*
13. I enjoy practising English with the people from English-speaking countries I meet.	3.54 (1.05)	97	3.14 (.987)	180	3.08**
<b>Factor 2</b>	17.5		16.6		
<b>Self-efficacy and expectation about learning English</b>	(2.39)	90	(2.47)	167	2.75**
4. English is (Please circle one answer) (a). a very difficult language (b). a difficult language (c). a language of medium difficulty (d). an easy language (e). a very easy language	2.81 (.714)	91	2.48 (.828)	167	3.39**
5. I believe that I will learn to speak English very well.	3.10 (.860)	97	2.65 (.910)	181	4.09***
21. I feel timid speaking English with other people.	3.18 (1.14)	97	3.51 (.954)	180	-2.61*
<b>Other items</b>					
27. Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.	3.85 (.870)	97	3.59 (.904)	179	2.30*

Note. <sup>1</sup>: Based on the results of Levene's Test for Equality of Variances.

Results show that subjects who implemented out-of-class activities tended to possess more positive beliefs regarding their English learning, in terms of their perceived value and nature of learning spoken English (factor one), as well as self-efficacy and expectation about learning English (factor two).

Differences found in the individual BALLI items indicate the following. Subjects who implemented out-of-class language-learning activities believed more that English can allow them to get a good job and get to know people from English-speaking countries better. These subjects also believed more that everyone can learn to speak a foreign language, and learning English is easy. They believed they would learn English well, and felt less timid speaking English with other people. They regarded that foreign language learning is different from learning other academic subjects. They also wanted to learn to speak English well, would like to have friends from English-speaking countries, and believed more in the importance of using audio-visual materials. They tended to believe that learning English is a matter of learning grammar and enjoyed practising English with the people from English-speaking countries.

The findings presented so far show that beliefs about language learning and implementing out-of-class language-learning activities are positively related.

Pearson product-moment correlations were performed to find out the existence of relationships between BALLs and the frequency of implementation of out-of-class language-learning activities. Because of the small number of responses of most activities given by subjects, only the first three types of activities (i.e., Watching film & TV, Listening, and Reading) of the first and second activity items given by subjects in the questionnaire were selected for analyses.

The frequency of implementing the activity 'Watching films and TV' given in the second activity item was found to be positively related to factor 2, *Self-efficacy and expectation about learning English* ( $r=.371, p<.01$ ). This finding means that learners who engaged in this activity tended to be more confident in their language learning (i.e., items 5,  $r=.352, p<.05$ ; item 16,  $r=.294, p<.05$ ), and would like to learn English for the purpose of getting to know people from English-speaking countries (item 24,  $r=.400, p<.01$ ). This activity was also found to be negatively correlated with items 19 ( $r=-.314, p<.05$ ), 21 ( $r=-.327, p<.01$ ) and 28 ( $r=-.515, p<.001$ ), which measure language aptitude of women, timidity in speaking English with other people, and translation respectively. These findings, again, show that subjects who implemented out-of-class language-learning activities had more positive beliefs regarding their English learning.

Listening activities were found to be positively correlated to three items on speaking and making friends with people from English-speaking countries (i.e., item 13,  $r=.515, p<.05$ ; item 24,  $r=.511, p<.05$ ; item 32,  $r=.492, p<.05$ ). This trend is quite natural, as listening is an essential means for making friends with native-speakers.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

### Conclusion

The contextual influences of English being a prestigious language in Hong Kong and being attached with tangible rewards and power are suggested to contribute to the prevalence of instrumental motivation among ESL learners in Hong Kong. These influences, together with notion of modesty and the fear of losing face in Confucianism, also contribute to the popularity out-of-class activities

related to receptive skills such as reading newspapers and watching TV rather than those involve productive skills such as face-to-face contacts and writing.

### **Recommendations for ESL Teaching**

There are three directions for recommendations. Firstly, teachers and curriculum planners should further foster the positive beliefs such as a high level of motivation and implementation of popular activities such as watching films in English of learners. Secondly, they should rectify the negative beliefs such as learning English is a matter of translation held by learners. Finally, they should provide support for learners to initiate activities related to productive skills such as making face-to-face interactions in English which are facilitative to their ESL learning. Details of these suggestions are given below.

Descriptive information of BALLs gathered can be used as guidelines for teaching this group of learners. In providing training on BALLs for learners, there are two directions. The first direction is to reinforce positive beliefs that are facilitative to their ESL learning. We should remember that subjects of this study held a lot of positive beliefs such as everyone can speak a foreign language, learning of English is different from learning other academic subjects, and culture learning is important in language learning. The other direction is to rectify counter-productive beliefs that might hinder their ESL learning, such as their over-optimistic view on the time needed for learning to speak a language well, and the view that language learning is a matter of learning vocabulary and grammar, and translation. Some concrete examples of activities include group sharing, reflection and diary writing. These activities can be carried out both inside and outside classrooms.

Workshops aiming at instilling beliefs that are facilitative to English learning, games on debunking myths on English learning are also good alternatives.

Subjects of this study recognised the value of out-of-class language-learning activities in their English learning. This implies that ESL learners in Hong Kong have high motivation in implementing out-of-class language-learning activities. Teachers of this group of learners should make the best possible use of this learner characteristic in order to obtain the best learning outcome on the part of learners. An example is to incorporate greater coverage of out-of-class language-learning activities into the curriculum. This means that a proportion of the subject marks can be allocated to some projects that require students to engage in out-of-class activities. An example is making face-to-face interactions with foreigners in the tourist areas by conducting surveys. Another example is requiring students to take part in volunteer work that involves English-speaking people. Allocating subject marks for out-of-class activities might be a more effective measure than just encouraging learners to take part in out-of-class language-learning activities.

As suggested earlier, contextual constraints might account for the lack of popularity of naturalistic language-learning activities. Teachers therefore need to provide instruction and raise learners' motivation in carrying out this type of activities. With the knowledge and motivation, learners will initiate more naturalistic language-learning activities. Workshops, classroom instruction, group sharing or even outings can be organised. These activities should aim at increasing learners' knowledge such as the resources available (e.g., English-speaking clubs in schools and other organisations in the community that they can join) for participating in naturalistic language-

learning activities, increasing learners' confidence and experience in interacting with others in English. Teachers can also provide guidance and support to students to organise naturalistic language-learning activities. An example is teachers invite students of other English-speaking schools to join for weekly chat groups. Teachers can provide guidance on the discussion topics and guide discussions at the beginning. As Campbell (1996) found, it is possible for a learner to create opportunities for learning a language out of a classroom.

Contextual constraints are also a possible reason for learners' preference for activities related to receptive skills of listening and reading rather than productive skills of speaking and writing. ESL teachers can create a school and classroom environment that is facilitative for learners' implementation of these activities involving productive skills of writing and speaking. At present, some schools organise conventional activities involving writing and speaking such as individual presentation and group discussion activities during lessons, and writing competition. More of this type of activities can be organised. In addition, the organisation of chat groups and English corners before school, during recess, lunch hour and after school is another good choice. More large-scale activities such as English-speaking week or English-speaking month that involve events such as English drama, English lyric writing and singing competition can create a more English-friendly environment for learners. Yet another example is to organise joint activities (e.g., cultural exchange, English debates) with schools and organisation with English-speaking students. At present, a lot of schools organise study tours to English-speaking countries for their students during vacations. This is a good way of providing

an environment that can facilitate the use of spoken English. After joining these activities, students can be required to write reflections and reports, and to present them to their schoolmates.

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Tel: 2708-6438

[manfredwu@yahoo.com]

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### Biographical data

Wu Man-fat, Manfred teaches in Hong Kong. He received his Doctorate of Education (*TESOL*) from the University of Leicester. His research interests are beliefs about language learning, language-learning strategies, language-learning styles, and out-of-class language learning activities.

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### Author

Dr. WU Man-fat, Manfred

Language Centre, Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (Haking Wong)

702 Lai Chi Kwok Road, Kowloon

### Appendix A: Descriptive Statistics of BALLI Items

BALLI items	N	Mean (SD)	%				
			Strongly disagree		Strongly agree		
			1	2	3	4	5
<i>Foreign language aptitude</i>							
1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.	324	3.96 (.972)	1.9	6.5	18.8	39.8	33.0
2. Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	323	3.90 (.909)	1.9	4.0	23.2	43.7	27.2
6. Hong Kong people are good at learning foreign languages.	324	3.00 (.802)	2.5	22.8	48.8	24.1	1.9
10. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	324	2.97 (.968)	6.5	24.4	38.9	25.9	4.3
11. People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign languages.	323	2.47 (1.06)	19.8	32.2	33.1	10.5	4.3
16. I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	324	2.25 (.878)	19.1	45.1	29.0	5.2	1.5
19. Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.	322	2.91 (1.10)	12.4	19.6	41.0	18.9	8.1
30. People who speak more than one language are very intelligent.	324	3.27 (1.06)	4.6	17.3	38.9	24.4	14.8
33. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.	323	3.74 (.995)	2.5	7.7	27.9	37.5	24.5
<i>The difficulty of language learning</i>							
3. Some languages are easier to learn than others.	321	3.53 (.990)	3.1	9.7	35.5	34.3	17.4
4. English is (Please circle one answer) (a). a very difficult language (b). a difficult language (c). a language of medium difficulty (d). an easy language (e). a very easy language	296	2.57 (.825)	(a) 11.1	(b) 30.7	(c) 49.0	(d) 8.4	(e) .7
5. I believe that I will learn to speak English very well.	324	2.81 (.920)	6.50	29.3	45.4	14.2	4.6
15. If someone spent one hour a day learning a language, how long would it take them to speak the language very well: (Please circle) (a). less than a year (b). 1-2 years (c). 3-5 years (d). 5-10 years (e). You can't learn a language in 1 hour a day.	292	2.81 (1.14)	11.3	31.5	32.9	13.7	10.6

BALLI items	N	Mean (SD)	%				
			Strongly disagree		Strongly agree		
			1	2	3	4	5
25. It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.	324	3.12 (1.02)	5.9	19.1	42.0	23.1	9.9
34. It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.	324	3.10 (1.09)	7.4	20.7	37.7	22.8	11.4
<i>The nature of language learning</i>							
8. It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures in order to speak English.	321	3.11 (1.01)	5.3	21.5	38.0	27.1	8.1
12. It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country.	323	3.80 (1.00)	1.5	8.7	27.6	32.8	29.4
17. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary words.	324	3.56 (.904)	2.2	7.7	36.4	39.5	14.2
23. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.	324	3.59 (.888)	1.2	9.6	32.4	42.9	13.9
27. Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.	321	3.63 (.903)	1.6	7.8	33.3	40.8	16.5
28. The most important part of learning English is learning how to translate from my native language.	324	3.51 (.933)	1.2	12.3	35.8	35.8	14.8
<i>Learning and communication strategies</i>							
7. It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.	322	3.75 (.984)	1.2	10.2	25.8	37.9	24.8
9. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.	320	2.53 (1.13)	19.7	32.8	29.4	11.3	6.9
13. I enjoy practising English with the people from English-speaking countries I meet.	322	3.30 (.997)	4.3	13.7	42.5	27.0	12.4
14. It's o.k. to guess if you don't know a word in English.	323	3.52 (.988)	3.4	9.9	34.1	36.5	16.1
18. It is important to repeat and practice a lot.	322	3.55 (.933)	2.5	8.7	35.1	38.8	14.9
21. I feel timid speaking English with other people.	323	3.42 (1.00)	3.1	14.2	35.0	33.1	14.6
22. If beginning students are permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.	323	3.00 (.919)	4.3	26.0	38.1	28.5	3.1
26. It is important to practice with audio-visual materials.	323	3.32 (.899)	1.5	16.4	38.7	35.0	8.4

BALLI items	N	Mean (SD)	%				
			Strongly disagree		Strongly agree		
			1	2	3	4	5
<i>Language learning motivations</i>							
20. People in Hong Kong feel that it is important to speak English.	324	4.10 (.867)	.9	3.7	16.4	42.6	36.4
24. I would like to learn English so that I can get to know people from English-speaking countries better.	319	3.29 (1.92)	3.8	18.2	39.8	31.0	7.2
29. If I learn English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.	324	4.33 (1.77)	.3	3.7	15.1	33.0	47.8
31. I want to learn to speak English well.	324	4.19 (.874)	0	4.0	18.2	32.1	45.7
32. I would like to have friends from English-speaking countries.	323	3.77 (.948)	.3	7.7	34.1	30.7	27.2