

Changes in language use in inner speech during study abroad: A study on Chinese university students in the UK.

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Inner speech, i.e. ‘silent speech for oneself’ (de Guerrero, 2018, p. 3), is a natural everyday cognitive activity. Following the premises of the Complementarity Principle (Grosjean, 2012), research on language use in inner speech identified different frequency of use in different discourse domains in inner speech in a foreign language (LX). For example, Dewaele (2015) found that LX was used significantly less in emotional inner speech than in general inner speech. Dewaele’s (2015) study measured general inner speech and emotional inner speech in a single question. Previous studies on LX inner speech were cross-sectional studies; and domains in inner speech were measured using single item in a questionnaire. The contribution of this study lies on the use of a multi-item inner speech scale and longitudinal design to further the understanding of changes in language use pattern in inner speech during LX socialization.

A total of 162 Chinese university students in the UK participated in this study. Two data collection points were conducted to collect data at the start and the end of the academic year. The first data collection point was October 2019 (Time 1); the second data collection point was March 2020 (Time 2). Participants completed an online questionnaire at both data collection points; six participants took part in follow-up interviews.

Frequency of language use in inner speech was measured by an eight-item inner speech scale, covering eight functions of inner speech. Domains in inner speech were then identified using factor analysis. Language use in inner speech was collected for LX English, L1 Mandarin, and L1 Chinese regional languages. Factor analysis revealed two factors at both Time 1 and Time 2: the general domain and the academic domain in LX English inner speech. A single factor was found for L1 Mandarin inner speech in Time 1; two factors: the general domain and the academic domain was found in Time 2. A single factor emerged for L1 Chinese regional languages inner speech throughout Time 1 and Time 2. Frequency of use at Time 1 was compared to that at Time 2. The results showed a general increase of frequency of use of LX English in inner speech; while L1 Mandarin academic inner speech (Time 2) was used less frequently compared to Time 1.

To conclude, this presentation provides a longitudinal and multi-domain perspective to language use in inner speech. The results showed that as participants immersed in the UK, changes in language preferences in inner speech were found not only in LX English, but also in L1 Mandarin.

References

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