An Inquiry into Characteristics of Motivation Among Chinese Students in a University Credit EAP Program

Mike Barker
Carleton University

Introduction

I remember feeling excited that day in Dunton Tower when it happened. I mean it's not often that an issue comes along that just seems to jump out and make me interested. But this was one of those issues. Here's how it happened.

It was a rainy Tuesday afternoon and we were sitting in our language classroom research class. We were discussing the range of possible research topics for our research projects. Gradually the discussion turned to the many challenges Chinese students face when they come to Carleton to study English for Academic Purposes. And it was interesting. As a teaching assistant in the EAP credit program, I had seen first-hand the impact of these challenges on my students and I had seen them struggle, but I had not truly reflected on the diversity of the challenges they faced. So, that day in Dunton Tower, as I listened to the visiting scholar from China and to several other Chinese students in the class it became clear that this issue had more confusing parts to it than one of those one of those frustrating little wooden puzzles on my parents' mantelpiece.

For starters, the ethnic makeup of a class. Apparently, in the ESL world there are floods of students from different countries that come to Canada at different times. According to statistics from the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, at Carleton University in recent years this flood has come from China (SLALS, 2003). And, as a consequence, many classes have experienced a consistent imbalance in the range of nationalities represented in each ESL class. This imbalance has in turn created a challenge not only for teachers trying to create a English language context in their classroom, but also for the students trying to master a new and challenging language in a classroom full of other students speaking their L1.

Then, of course, there is the issue of teaching styles. While differences in teaching styles that exist between east and west are discussed at length elsewhere in this volume, in the context of this article the issue is simple: how do students from China adapt to the shift from the teacher-centred approach so dominant in their country, to the more communicative-oriented approach employed at Carleton? And further related to this

question, how do changes in class size from sixty to sixteen affect the strategies students use to learn?

And then of course, there is the issue of test anxiety as many students focus their attention and subsequently their learning strategies on passing the CAEL exam, their perceived ticket to higher education. Suddenly the prospect of being a Chinese student at Carleton becomes a somewhat intimidating proposal. And that's only at this end; in Canada. What about influences at the other end; in China?

It seems self-evident that there exists a social and political divide separating life in socialist China from life in democratic capitalist Canada. The social contexts are just different. In each nation, different systems of protocol define "appropriate" behaviour, different political ideologies shape and reshape daily life and different concepts of success or failure guide the actions or the countries' respective citizenry. Confucianism, the Single Child Policy, family structure, language, and economics are just a few ways in which life in China is different from life in Canada. As a consequence, the question becomes: how are newly arrived students adapting to life in a culture so different from their own? Are they in shock? Are they finding it easy to adjust? Or are they simply recreating their old culture in a new place?

And so, these were some of the issues that came to the floor that rainy day in Dunton Tower. Issues that came to the floor, were picked up, shaken a little and put down again. Issues that pointed more to questions than answers. And ultimately, issues that awoke an interest in me to know more about the situation. So anyway, I don't remember if it was that day or the next, but I went home and I started work on a questionnaire designed to steer inquiring minds toward some kind of an answer.

What I wanted to know was, what do Chinese students in the Carleton think is motivating them to learn English and how does this compare with what the teachers think is motivating them? And notice that I choose the word think carefully here. That's because, what people say they think and what their actions show they think may not be the same thing at all (Block, 2000).

Making the Questionnaire
Making a questionnaire is not as easy as it looks. This is especially the case when a person is trying to create one that explores something as complex and as difficult to pin down as motivation. And while researchers have attempted numerous frameworks within which to understand the concept, at the time I created this questionnaire, my exposure to this literature was limited to the inside dust jackets of books by Norman Vincent Peale and Anthony Robbins. So, over the course of the following sections, I will attempt to lead you through the process by which I developed the

questionnaire and hopefully in the process shed some light on the questions I hoped it would answer.

Part 1
There are many notions circulating about why students choose to study English at Carleton. The questionnaire items in Part 1 are geared toward either confirming or denying some of these notions.

I am studying English so I can:
(1) ...pass the TOEFL and/or CAEL
(2) ...get a better job when I finish my university studies
(3) ...please my parents
(4) ...speak it perfectly
(5) ...immigrate to an English-speaking country

For example, do students choose to study in Canada in response to parental expectations: yes or no? Are students studying specifically to pass a test: yes or no?

However, because motivation is such a complex issue, simple yes no answers are not always either (a) possible or (b) accurate. With this in mind then, questionnaire items in this section are also laying the groundwork for potential comparisons between other items in later sections of the questionnaire. For example, if students think they will ultimately learn to speak the English perfectly, just how realistic is this as an expectation? And, when contrasted with the actions students say they take to learn English, what do their responses indicate about their true commitment to this perfection?

Another issue I am trying to address in this section is whether a student is learning English so he/she can find a better job in his/her own country or in an English speaking country. Hopefully, the contrast between questionnaire item (QI) 2 and item 5 will highlight differing students' intentions. Why do I care? Well, because the strategies used by a person who actually wants to live in a linguistic environment different from their own may differ from a person who plans to return to their L1 environment to live.

Part 2
I designed this part of the questionnaire to try and find out how students believe they will use English in future. Again, to understand this motivation is to understand students commitment to the learning process. If you believe you will not use English very often, how committed will you be to learning it well?

(6) In my life, I plan…
- ☐ …to speak English like a native speaker without an accent
- ☐ …to speak English like a native speaker but with an accent
- ☐ …to be able to speak comfortably about complex subjects like literature, computers and psychology
- ☐ …to be able to understand and speak to people easily on the telephone
- ☐ …to be able to order food in a restaurant and to give directions
- ☐ …I don't plan to speak English well

(7) In my life, I plan to use English…
- ☐ …every day
- ☐ …often
- ☐ …from time to time
- ☐ …rarely
- ☐ …never

I had a lot of trouble with item 6 and I'm still not happy with it. The choices seem limiting to me now and do not appear to reflect a good spread of options. When I made the questionnaire, I remember thinking about using categories like well, excellent, etc. But in the end I decided to give students something more specific and tangible to respond to. I also designed the first two choices in item 6 to contrast with QI 4 and QI 5 above. That is to say, if someone said they wanted to speak the language perfectly, did they also say that they wanted to speak it with no accent? And if they did, did they also say that they wanted to immigrate to an English-speaking country?

In QI 7, the slant is a little different. Here I am trying to find out if students really think they will use English again after they are finished studying it. And, if not, then how will this affect their motivation to learn it? More specifically, how might learning strategies differ between students who do not think they will use much and those who think they will use it often? Items regarding these strategies are found later in Parts 4 and 5.

Part 3

As I look at these items now, I am not sure they answer the question I first intended. When I first made the questionnaire, I remember wanting to know why students chose Canada over all the other countries they could have chosen: the United States, Australia, Great Britain to name a few. But it seems, in the end, I ended up asking questions about more affective and contextual aspects of motivation; which is okay as luck would have it.

(8) I chose to come to Canada to study English:
- ❑ …because I am interested in Canadian culture.
- ❑ …because I wanted to be with my friends.
- ❑ …because I wanted to learn English in an English-speaking environment.
- ❑ …because I wanted to have a vacation.
- ❑ …because I didn't get high enough marks in my home country to study at university there.

QI 8: many programs from coast to coast offer language programs built around the theme of Canadian culture; at least one series of books has been created to serve this perceived need, but, are students really interested in it?

QI 9,11 & 12: is it as simple as that? Are students coming here to study because their friends are doing it? Are they coming here for vacation? Are they coming here because they can't go to university back home?

QI 10: are students consciously putting themselves in an English-speaking environment rather than trying to learn English in their own country? And if so, to what extent are they actually reaching out to the English-speaking community in an effort to make connections with it? The latter is not an easy question. It is difficult enough to make connections in a new town when you speak the language, much less when you do not.

Part 4
This section is probably the most consciously thought-out part of the questionnaire; and perhaps to its detriment. In this section, I tried to set up a dichotomy between activities in which students either used English in a communicative way or learned about English either through exercises or through explanations in their own language. And, while I think the contrast is a worthwhile, I worry that by the time students actually complete these questionnaires, they will have already framed a pretty solid understanding of Carleton's teaching philosophy and, as a result, their answers might tend to already reflect sensitivity to what they think teachers want to hear.

I will improve my English most by:
(13)
- ❑   ...doing many grammar exercises
- ❑   ...writing an essay in English
(14)
- ❑   ...speaking with English speakers
- ❑   ...practicing pronunciation with a computer program
(15)
- ❑   ...listening to an English speaker explain an English idiom
- ❑   ...listening to someone explain an English idiom in my own language
(16)
- ❑   ...translating newspaper articles from my own language to English

❑   ...watching TV and listening to the radio in English
(17)
❑   ...looking up a word in an English/English dictionary
❑   ...looking up a word on my electronic dictionary

I am particularly interested in responses to QI 17 since I have noticed many students using their electronic dictionaries on a daily basis. They do it, but do they think it is a good strategy or not?

Part 5
This section of the questionnaire is the shotgun section: a wide variety of questionnaire items on a wide variety of topics. Items in this section address a range of student beliefs including: what is appropriate behaviour in the classroom environment; what are the characteristics of the teacher and of the teaching methodology; what are characteristics of a good language learner; whose job it is to motivate the student; and so on. There are also items that ask about the actions a student believes he/she *should* take in contrast to the actions he/she *actually* takes.

(18)   Students must speak only English in class.
(19)   Students speak only English in class.
(20)   It is the teacher's job to make students want to learn.
(21)   It is disrespectful for students to have opinions different from their teacher.
(22)   Teachers must be a native speaker of English.
(23)   It is disrespectful for a teacher to drink coffee in class.
(24)   Students learn English best by listening carefully to a teacher's lecture.
(25)   If a student makes a speech error, the teacher must correct it immediately.
(26)   It is disrespectful for students to call teachers by their first name.
(27)   Speaking English with other ESL students will not help me improve my English skills.
(28)   It is disrespectful for students to eat in class.
(29)   Males are better language learners than females.
(30)   I speak English often outside of my English class.
(31)   Group work is better than lectures for learning English.

One of my particular favourite items in this section is QI 23 because I am quite interested to know whether my drinking a cup of coffee in during class actually detracts from the learning experience. Do they find it distracting; like maybe having a price tag hanging off the back of my shirt? Do they find it disrespectful in contrast to more discipline-oriented classrooms they have known? Or does it undermine my authority as a teacher by making me appear more casual and therefore more lenient?

Part 6
The final part of the questionnaire approaches a number of issues in what I hope is a contextualized way.

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(32)   Victor is upset. He says there are too many people in his class who come from his native country. As a result, he spends most of the class speaking his native language and not English. What should the teacher do? Choose only one:
❑   tell Victor not to speak his own language
❑   put Victor with a partner from a different country
❑   reorganize the whole class so that students work with partners from different countries
❑   make a rule that everyone in the class speak English
❑   discuss the topic with the class

QI 32, for example, asks students to think about the actions a teacher should take when students are not speaking the target language in class. And as mentioned earlier, with a student body comprised of large numbers of students of a single nationality, this situation is not as uncommon as one might hope. The main objective of this question is to find out where students feel their locus of control lies. If students put the onus on the teacher to regulate the use of English, what does that say about their perceived ownership of their own learning process; about their own ability to self-monitor their language production? Also, how might these issues be related to cultural issues of control and power?

I am not happy with QI 33. I don't feel there is an adequate range of options for the respondents to choose from.

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(33)   Meet four students. Do not worry if the person is male or female. Think only about their use of English. Who is the most similar to you? Choose only one:
❑   Bobbi speaks only English in class. Outside of class, she hangs around with friends from her country and speaks only her native language.
❑   Bobbie is embarrassed about her English skills and does not speak in class. She does speak a little English in the community, but most of the time she speaks her native language.
❑   In class, Bobby often uses his electronic dictionary and speaks English only when the teacher asks him a question. Otherwise, he speaks his native language. Outside of class, he only speaks his native language.
❑   In class, Bob forces himself to speak only English. Outside class - in his other classes and in the community in general - he attempts to talk to English speakers as much as possible.

However, having said this, I have to say I like the intention of the item. I think it's useful to have students characterize themselves as a learner. With

this information I will be able to explore correlations between a student's perception of themselves as a learner and the strategies and beliefs that characterize their learning process in general.

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(34)   As part of your ESL program, you are required to choose 3 of the
       following elective courses. Indicate your choices below:
       - 1 - first choice
       - 2 - second choice
       - 3 - third choice
❑   English for Business
❑   English for Academic Purposes
❑   Everyday English
❑   Pronunciation Practice
❑   Conversational English
❑   Speaking in Front of a Group
❑   Writing in English
❑   Speed Reading

The goal of QI 34 is to uncover what students' priorities for learning English. What do students think they need to work on the most and/or how do they believe they will need to use English in the future? However, beyond these questions, it will also be interesting to see if there is a correlation between the activities they choose and other motivating factors found in the questionnaire? For example, does someone who chooses *English for Business* as his/her first choice also *plan to use English every day*? Or, does someone who chooses *Conversational English* choose it because they will not speak English unless forced by circumstance to do so?

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(35)   I am studying English:
❑   ...because I want to
❑   ...because I have to

And last of all, QI 35 is a question that really cuts to the heart of the whole motivation issue. Are students studying English because *they want to* or because they feel *they have to*? And this is really the crux of the issue, isn't it? Because, the control students perceive in their own learning process has to be a powerful indicator of long term motivation and commitment to the language learning process. I'm sure researchers in the field of motivational psychology would have a thing or two to say about the differences between implicit and explicit motivation; about innate motivation to learn versus motivation imposed from outside. Unfortunately, however, only longitudinal work in the field and not a single questionnaire can pursue this issue with any degree of precision. And certainly no triangulating items in the questionnaire hold the answer. However, in examining student responses to

this item, it may be possible to uncover correlation between a student's stated reason for studying English – *I want to* versus *I have to* – and either the actions the person takes or the way in which he/she characterized him/herself as a learner.

Adaptation of questionnaire to teachers
However, not content simply to examine the perceptions of students regarding their motivation to learn English, I was also interested in what teachers thought about their students motivations. Identifying differences between what students think and what teachers think they think is arguably a way to reduce misunderstandings, to better target instruction and to better meet the perceived needs of the learners.

Adaptation of the questionnaire was relatively simple and involved only some clever changes to wording and the modification of pronouns in each of the relevant sections. As a result, questions like *I am studying English so I can* became, *They are studying English so they can*. And so on. Part 4 was modified and space was given for teachers to say what they thought and what they thought their students thought. While QI 33 – the item that asks students to self-identify themselves as learners - was changed and instead asked teachers to identify the percentage of students in their classes they felt fell into the available categories.

Methodology
I learned a lot from the implementation process of this study, not least of which is that orchestrating questionnaire research involves a whole lot more than just handing out questionnaires.

Context
The ESL program in Carleton University's School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies is divided into two streams: intensive and credit. The intensive stream is designed for students of lower English proficiency and offers 25 hours of instruction per week. The credit stream is for students of higher proficiency and provides instruction for nine hours per week. Students often begin at the intensive level and move up into the credit stream. The credit stream is designed to prepare students to function in an English-only academic environment and offers courses at three levels: ESL 130, ESL 150 and ESL 190.

Subjects for my research project were drawn from the ESL 130 level, the lowest level of the credit program. We, the members of the motivation research group, selected this level because several of us worked as teaching assistants at the ESL130 level and so had access to the students.

Informed Consent and Sensitivity to the Subjects
However, by saying that we had ready access to students, I don't mean to imply that we exploited it. One of the things I learned from doing this project was that, just because I have a roomful of students, does not mean that I am ethically permitted to inflict a questionnaire on them at will. Hence the issue of informed consent.

In a project such as this, students need to know that they have a choice to participate in the study or not. And in a class in which their teacher is administering a questionnaire, students need to know that their teacher is not going to somehow punish them if they choose not to participate. To formalize this process, informed consent forms written in concise and basic English, were used. These forms, in addition to describing the purpose of the study, made it abundantly clear that participation was not a requirement of the class and that students responses would remain anonymous.

A second thing I had to be aware of as a researcher was that, students have paid a lot of money in order to learn English and not to play guinea pig in some experiment. Therefore, I needed to be aware that large amounts of time could not be taken away from the class to administer the questionnaire. Approximately fifteen to twenty minute time slots were used.

Subjects
Questionnaires were administered to six ESL 130 classes. Composition of these classes is detailed in the Results section below. Composition of the ESL program as a whole (see Table 1 below) is reflected in this sample.

NATIONALITY	NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN PROGRAM (%)
China	178 (61%)
Korea	51 (18%)
Japan	12 (4%)
UAE	6 (2%)
Mexico	5 (2%)
Saudi Arabia	5 (2%)
Taiwan	5 (2%)
Turkey	4 (1%)
Vietnam	4 (1%)
Iran	2 (1%)
Slovakia	2 (1%)
Libya	2 (1%)
Argentina	1 (<1%)
Cambodia	1 (<1%)
Canada	1 (<1%)

El Salvador	1 (<1%)
Italy	1 (<1%)
Jordan	1 (<1%)
Kosovo	1 (<1%)
Morocco	1 (<1%)
Sri Lanka	1 (<1%)
Syria	1 (<1%)
Thailand	1 (<1%)
Venezuela	1 (<1%)
unknown	3 (2%)

(Source: SLALS, 2003)

Table 1 - Composition of SLALS ESL Program by Nationality
(Winter – 2003)

MALE	**FEMALE**
42 %	58 %
	n= 98

(Source: questionnaire data, 2003)

Table 2 - Composition of ESL 130 Group by Gender (Winter – 2003)

Administration of the Questionnaire

• *Problems*

One of the most important things I learned about administering a questionnaire, is the importance of piloting. In this project, an unintentional pilot of two classes was done. I say *unintentional* because the responses from these two classes indicated problems with the structure of the questionnaire that needed to be rectified before continuing.

One problem had to do with the construction of the Likert scale.

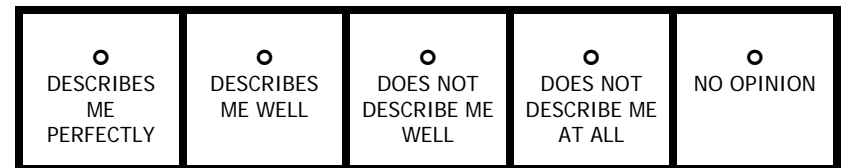| ○ DESCRIBES ME PERFECTLY	○ DESCRIBES ME WELL	○ DOES NOT DESCRIBE ME WELL	○ DOES NOT DESCRIBE ME AT ALL	○ NO OPINION

Figure 1 – Likert Scale Structure from the Questionnaire

Because the *No Opinion* choice is on the extreme right and *Describes me Perfectly* is on the extreme left, without adequate instruction students were choosing *No Opinion* when their intention was to select *Does not Describe me at All.* A suggested improvement to this structure can be seen in Figure 2 below.
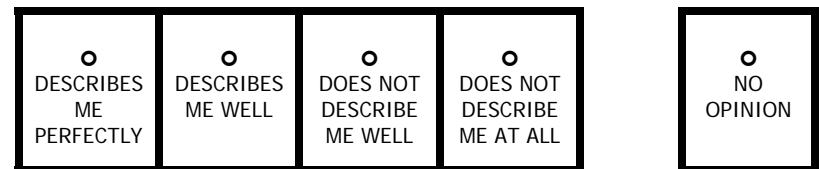
○ DESCRIBES ME PERFECTLY	○ DESCRIBES ME WELL	○ DOES NOT DESCRIBE ME WELL	○ DOES NOT DESCRIBE ME AT ALL		○ NO OPINION

Figure 2 – Suggested Modification to Likert Scale Structure for the Questionnaire

A second problem was discovered in questionnaire item 34, the selection of first, second and third choices of elective ESL courses. Rather than choosing only three options, students were rating each course as either a 1, 2 or 3. Data from these groups was rejected for the purposes of this paper, however, subsequent work will attempt to render it useable. Pre-questionnaire instruction rectified these problems in subsequent classes.

- *Administering Student Questionnaires*

Following completion of the *Informed Consent Forms*, I provided a brief orientation to the questionnaire using overheads during which the problem areas above were addressed. Students then had between fifteen and twenty minutes to complete the questionnaires.

In addition to the two *unintentional* pilot sessions, questionnaires were distributed in three other classes. The final *n* for useable questionnaires was 43.

- *Administering Teacher Questionnaires*

As was the case with students, I had to be conscious of the fact that asking a teacher to take fifteen minutes out of his/her day to fill out a questionnaire is a substantial imposition; especially if there are ten other research students trying to do the same thing. However, response from the teachers was excellent with 18 teachers from both the credit and intensive programs responding.

Results

Researchers in education, sociology and psychology have spent a lot of time trying to develop categories, theories and/or ways of looking at motivation in an effort to better understand how it works. However, in the context of this results section, I make little effort to use their insights to catalogue my data. Instead, it is my intention to present the data here in as raw a form as possible and then later, in the analysis section, to explore this data using a somewhat qualitative approach in an attempt to create webs of motivational relationships between the various questionnaire items. Categories may emerge from this exploratory venture. However, they may not. Because, if you haven't guessed by now, *motivation* in all its guises is anything but simple to explain.

Demographic Information

Information from the questionnaires shows a range of six different nationalities: Chinese, Taiwanese, Iranian, Mexican, Canadian, and Jordanian. Of this group, Chinese students represent almost 80 percent. The ratio of men to women is 44:56. And the average age is 21 with a maximum of 37 and a minimum of 18. The mode for age is 20.

Data Summary

In the interests of space, I have summarized results from the Likert scales into two categories: *agree* and *disagree*. In the questionnaire itself, subjects have more than two choices. In the appendix are sample questionnaires.

ITEM #	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEM	STUDENT REASONS (%)		TEACHER PERCEPTION OF STUDENT REASONS (%)	
	* Note: percentages may not add up to 100% as a result of "no opinion" responses.	AGREE (%)	DISAGREE (%)	AGREE (%)	DISAGREE (%)
1	I am studying English so I can pass the TOEFL and/or CAEL	53	42	72	17
2	I am studying English so I can get a better job	88	9	56	31
3	I am studying English so I can please my parents	49	44	69	13
5	I am studying English so I can immigrate to an English speaking country	44	42		81
8	I chose to come to Canada to study English b/c I am interested in Canadian culture	40	42	12	76
9	I chose to come to Canada to study English b/c I wanted to be with my friends	16	72	6	72
10	I chose to come to Canada to study English b/c I wanted to learn English in an English-speaking environment	84	14	78	11
11	I chose to come to Canada to study English b/c I wanted a vacation	16	79		94
12	I chose to come to Canada to study English b/c I didn't get high enough marks in my home country to study there	28	67	17	50

Table 3 - Why do students think they are studying English ?

ITEM #	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEM	STUDENT BELIEFS (%)	TEACHER PERCEPTION OF STUDENT BELIEFS (%)
	Note: percentages may not add up to 100% as a result null responses		
6	In my life I plan…		
	- to speak English like a native speaker without an accent	51	6
	- to speak English like a native speaker with an accent	23	29
	- to be able to speak comfortably about complex subjects like literature, computers and psychology	26	47
	- to be able to understand and speak to people easily on the telephone		18
	- to be able to order food in a restaurant and to give directions		
	- I don't plan to speak English well		
7	In my life, I plan to use English…		
	- every day	37	41
	- often	58	41
	- from time to time	2	29
	- rarely	2	
	- never		6

Table 4 (a) - What are Student Beliefs Regarding their Eventual Mastery of English?

ITEM #	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEM	STUDENT BELIEFS		TEACHER PERCEPTION OF STUDENT BELIEFS	
	Note: percentages may not add up to 100% as a result of "no opinion" responses.	AGREE (%)	DISAGREE (%)	AGREE (%)	DISAGREE (%)
4	I am studying English so I can speak it perfectly	84	14	29	50

Table 4 (b) - Student Beliefs Regarding Eventual Mastery of English

ITEM #	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEM *Note: percentages may not add up to 100% as a result null responses*	STUDENT BELIEFS (%)	TEACHER PERCEPTION OF STUDENT BELIEFS (%)	TEACHER'S OWN BELIEFS (%)
	I will improve my English most by…			
13	• doing many grammar exercises	10	56	
	• writing an essay in English	90	44	94
14	• speaking with English speakers	93	72	89
	• practicing pronunciation with a computer program	7	11	
15	• listening to an English speaker explain an English idiom	74	33	78
	• listening to someone explain an English idiom in my own language	26	50	6
16	• translating newspaper articles from my own language to English	2	44	
	• watching TV and listening to the radio in English	98	44	94
17	• looking up a work in an English/English dictionary	58	11	83
	• using my electronic dictionary to discover the meaning of the word in my language	42	72	

Table 5   What do students think about the language learning process itself; how it works; which strategies work best; and so on?

	ITEM #	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEM	STUDENT BELIEFS		TEACHER BELIEFS	
		*Note: percentages may not add up to 100% as a result of "no opinion" responses.	AGREE (%)	DISAGREE (%)	AGREE (%)	DISAGREE (%)
TEACHING METHOD	24	Students learn English best by listening carefully to a teacher's lecture	63	21	17	83
	31	Group work is better than lectures for learning English	58	23	83	6
	27	Speaking English with other ESL students will not help me improve my English skills	19	67		100
TEACHER ROLE	20	It is the teacher's job to make the students want to learn	42	47	44	50
	25	If a student makes a speech error, the teacher must correct it immediately	51	44	6	94
	21	It is disrespectful for students to have opinions different from their teacher.	19	72		100
	22	Teachers must be native speakers of English	86	30	11	89
CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT	18	Students must speak only English in class	86	9	78	22
	23	It is disrespectful for a teacher to drink coffee in class	12	67		78
	26	It is disrespectful for teachers to call teachers by their first name	19	65		100
	28	It is disrespectful for students to eat in class	37	44		100
ACTION	19	Students speak only English in class	65	30	22	72
		Students often speak English outside English class	47	47	18	71
CONCEPTS OF LEARNER	29	Males are better language learners than females	7	77		82

Table 6 – Student Beliefs about the Language Learning Process and Teacher Beliefs about the Language Learning Process
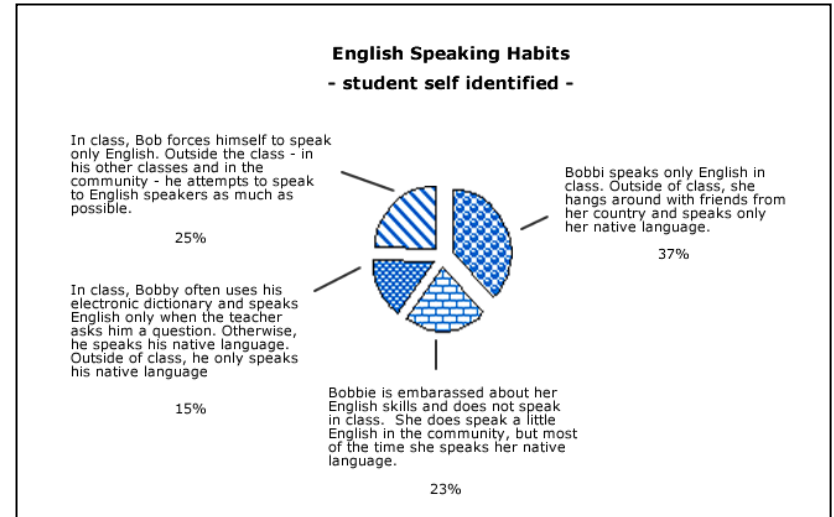
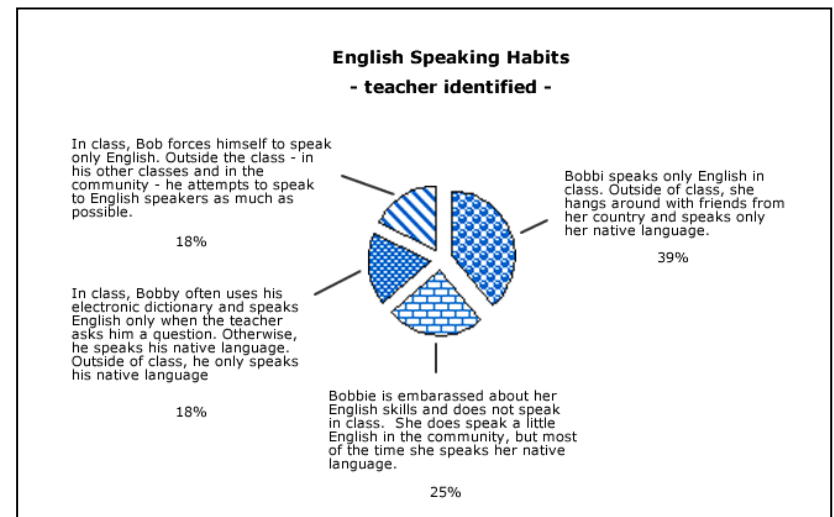Figure 3. - How do students conceive of themselves as language learners and of their role in the process?

Figure 4 – How does a teacher assess his/her students' use of English?

ITEM #	* Note: percentages may not add up to 100% as a result of "no opinion" responses. * responses from teachers were almost uniformly annoyed with this question. Most said they would use all these interventions.	STUDENT CHOICE (%)	TEACHER PERCEPTION OF STUDENT CHOICE (%)
32	tell Victor not to speak his own language	2	
	put Victor with a partner from another country	16	6
	reorganize the whole class so that students work with partners from different countries	49	17
	make a rule that everyone in the class speak English	30	6
	discuss the topic with the class		50

Table 7 – Student Concept of Locus of Control

ITEM #	* Note: percentages may not add up to 100% as a result of "no opinion" responses.	STUDENT CHOICE (%)	TEACHER PERCEPTION OF STUDENT CHOICE (%)
34	English for Academic Purposes	19	26
	Conversational English	19	17
	English for Business	13	9
	Writing in English	12	19
	Everyday English	10	7
	Speaking in Front of a Group	6	2
	Speed Reading	5	6
	Pronunciation Practice	3	15

Table 8 – Student Priorities for English Learning

ITEM #	* Note: percentages may not add up to 100% as a result of "no opinion" responses.	STUDENT CHOICE (%)	TEACHER PERCEPTION OF STUDENT CHOICE (%)
35	I am studying English because I want to	71	33
	I am studying English because I have to	29	67

Table 9 – Student Impetus for Studying English

Discussion

So, if those were the *Results*, then the question becomes: okay, so what do they tell us?

Well, as I mentioned earlier, the objective of this study is one of exploration; a *shotgun* approach to the issue of *motivation*.

So, in keeping with this objective, the following analysis section will be made up of a series of mini-explorations of the data; a pellet by pellet examination of a spread of topics represented by the questionnaire results.

And while this examination may stray to the bizarre – i.e. why is there a correlation between coffee drinking protocol and language mastery? – it will also attempt to keep to the mainstream and either confirm or deny commonly-held beliefs about language learners and about their process of learning – i.e. are students studying English so they can get a better job after they graduate?

However, bizarre or otherwise, confirming or denying, these mini-explorations will keep one main objective in their sights. That is, to understand more clearly why and how Chinese students believe they are motivated to learn English.

 Why are students coming to Canada to study English?

Why are Chinese students coming to Canada to study English? Well, to begin with, let's look at why they are not. They are not coming to Canada *for a* vacation. They are not coming here to be with their friends. And only a third of them say they are here because their marks are too low to go to university back in their home country. Even a professed interest in Canadian culture is not the primary incentive for coming to Canada to study.

No, the primary reason for coming to Canada, students say and teachers agree, is *to study English in an English-speaking environment*.

And whether or not they are truly getting out and taking advantage of all this environment has to offer, this is why students believe they have come.

But what does this mean, *to study English in an English-speaking environment*? Well, if the questionnaire does it's job right, some clues as to what students think it means may be found in the actions students take in the non-classroom environment. The signs are not encouraging.

Of all students, only 47 percent (Table 6.) say they *speak English often outside the classroom;* a number disputed by teachers who set the value at just 18 percent. Only 25 percent (Figure 3.) characterize themselves as *forcing themselves to speak English in the community. A*nd 2 percent (Table 7.) appear to take an active role in monitoring their own use of English in an L1 setting.

No, as far as capitalizing on the Englishness of their surroundings is concerned, to Chinese students learning English in an English-speaking environment seems to mean being forced to speak English in the classroom while outside of class seeking refuge in their own L1. A somewhat blunt assessment perhaps. But it is not meant to sound as pessimistic as it does. Why? Well, because the truth is, whether they join the campus outdoor club, get a job at Tim Horton's, play badminton with English-speakers or not, students going to university here in Canada cannot help but be exposed to more English on an every day basis than they would be back in China.

But the real question to raise here is: do students believe that speaking English outside the classroom actually contributes to their learning process? Unfortunately, no triangulating *evidence* was included in the questionnaire to help us answer this question .

Do students speak English in class?

So, if students are not very keen on speaking English in the community, is the situation any different in the classroom? Well, students seem to think so. According to Table 6., 65 percent of students say that students speak English in the classroom. This in contrast to teachers who estimate the value at only 22 percent. Now, this may reflect an overestimate by students who live in a permanent *state* of denial or it may represent and underestimate from a group of teachers who have grown tired of saying "English only please." But who's right? A comparison of the values above with the results from Figures 3 and 4 may well hold the answer.

Figures 3 and 4 show that teachers seem to know their students speaking habits very well. with only a few percent difference between what the students said and what the teachers said. So, if we assume that these values are a fair assessment of reality – they are so close together after all - then we can see that the number of students who either *force themselves to speak English both in and out of class* or *speak English in class but not out*

class is approximately 60 percent. Which would suggest that the students, with their assessment of 65 percent, are actually closer to the mark than their instructors. But 60 percent; is that good enough?

Who is in charge of making students speak English?

According to about half of the teachers and half of the students (Table 6.), it is up to the teacher to motivate students to want to learn. So, already, half of the teachers are taking control of students' impetus to learn; and half of the students are letting them do it.

Furthermore, 95 percent of students (Table 7.) say it is up to the teacher and not the student to control the use of English in the classroom. Does this mean that in a class that is 99.99 percent Chinese, students will take no responsibility for self-monitoring? And if this is true, does it mean that students see little value in the process of talking amongst themselves in the target language as a tool for language acquisition? Is learning, for them, something that only comes out of a book? Well, no. We can't quite go that far. Why? Well, because according to Table 6., 67 percent of students believe speaking to their peers is a useful thing to do.

And lastly, almost 40 percent of students (Figure 3.) in the survey identify themselves as either *speaking English only when spoken to by the teacher* or being *too embarrassed to speak it at all*. Does this tell us anything conclusive? Well, no not really. Nothing beyond the fact that just under half of the students in ESL 130 may choose to sit in class and say nothing in English unless - or even if - called upon by a teacher.

Therefore, the take-home message here seems to be that students want and need to be pushed to produce in English while at the same time to be protected from their own inability to stop themselves from speaking their own L1.

Do students really want to study English or is it an obligation?

The majority of students in the ESL 130 program say they are studying English because they *want to* (Table 9.). But, are they telling the truth or are they just saying what they want to believe? And, if they are telling the truth, are they studying it because they want to demonstrate the right answer or because they want to use the language to communicate? These are not easy questions to answer.

One way to at least take a shot at it is to assume that those who really *want* to use English are the same ones as those who say they actually *do* use it. If we assume this, then we can make a comparison between this information – QI 35 (Table 9.) - and QI 30 (Table 6.) and make some extrapolations:

QI 35:	71 percent of students are studying English because they want to			
QI 30:	47 percent of students often speak English outside English class			
STUDENTS WHO WANT TO STUDY	-	**STUDENTS WHO SPEAK IT OFTEN**	=	**STUDENTS WHO STUDY IT BUT DON'T WANT TO USE IT**

Figure 6. – Extrapolation to determine the proportion of students who want to study English but who do not necessarily want to use it

What this means is that, if we do the math, we find that of the 71 percent of students who say they are studying because they *want to*, 24 percent may not necessarily want to use it often. They may want to be able to say they use it, but not necessarily use it *often*. From a motivation point of view, this suggests that one quarter of students may be more interested in demonstrating proficiency in English rather than actually attaining it. In the classroom, this group may represent an increased risk of plagiarism as they attempt to demonstrate an advanced level of ability without having an interest in attaining it.

Are students studying English to get a better job?

Eighty-eight percent of students say they are studying English to get a better job (Table 3.). And that's interesting since zero percent of teachers thought this was an important issue for learners.

But does this mean a better job in an English-speaking country where they may find themselves surrounded by English speaking society and subject to English-speaking society social norms whatever those might be? Or does it mean a better job back in China where their use of English will be English as a communication tool and nothing more?

Well, if 88 percent say want to get a better job and 44 percent (Table 3.) say they want to immigrate, then why don't we split the difference and say that half of these jobs will be in China and half will be in an English-speaking nation leaving a small number of students undecided. So, if that's the case, then further in-depth statistical analysis of these groups may reveal the existence of differing yet distinct motivational patterns between these groups. Perhaps a tidbit for later research.

An additional line of inquiry to be pursued in this section lies specifically with the group that intends to return to China to work. The question is, do these students who return to China truly believe that they really need the ability to communicate in English for their work, or do they believe that they only need a piece of paper that says they are capable of

doing so? No doubt, student answers to this question will reveal something about students overall commitment to the learning process.

Unfortunately, to really understand this issue, would require information about the day-to-day use of English in companies in China. However, using QI 7 (Table 3.) we can attempt some extrapolation. That is to say if, as the table indicates, 95 percent of students intend to use English *daily* or at least *often* and if as Table 3. indicates, 44 percent of students intend to return to China, then the suggestion is that students working in China will require demonstrable skills in English rather than a piece of paper that proves them.

Are students studying English to please their parents?

Data shows that approximately half the students admit to being motivated by a desire to please their parents (Table 3.). This is a large fraction and the absence of a correlation between this item and sex indicates that this motivation cuts across gender lines.

It's not easy to understand how socially intentioned motivation works at the best of times. For some it means simply a desire to please without an awareness of or commitment to the actual skill being attained. For others, those who recognize and identify with the usefulness of the skill being learned, it may be the incentive that props up flagging commitment when the going gets rough. And for others still, it may mean not admitting to it even when it does exist on the basis of other confounding motives like pride or self-reliance. Suffice to say then that, according to the data, approximately 50 percent of Chinese students in ESL 130 – the first wave of students born and raised under the single child policy – are motivated by their parents expectations.

What does it mean to speak English perfectly?

Speaking English perfectly is a difficult concept to peg down. Does it mean to have no accent, to make no grammatical mistakes, to never choose a wrong word? What? Well, in the context of the questionnaire the term perfectly meant whatever the respondent wanted it to mean. And student responses indicate that speaking perfectly is a high priority for them. No fewer than 84 percent of respondents said they intended to speak English perfectly. Eighty-four percent! And 51 percent said they wanted to speak English as well as an English speaker without an accent. These values are high and, many might say, unrealistic expectations. So the question becomes: is having such high expectations motivating students or is it getting in their way when it comes to language learning. High expectations

may be useful if they inspire and prompt students on to higher levels of achievement than they might otherwise aspire to. However, there are also drawbacks. For instance: does having high expectations mean that students will be more inhibited about speaking or writing anything less than perfectly; does it mean that students who feel the need to produce perfect assignments will be more likely to plagiarize and therefore attempt to attain perfection through artificial means?

Responses from the teachers indicate that they are unaware of this motivation for perfection underlying students' drive to learn (Table 4b.). Unexpectedly, there are also several additional correlations of note between this questionnaire item and those pertaining to coffee and/or food in the classroom. Further probing of this area might reveal some kind of cultural or affective motivation at work here. That is to say, students who feel obliged to aspire to perfection in language may also have certain beliefs about the politeness and/or appropriateness of certain behaviours concerning food and drink in the classroom.

 Are students studying English so they can pass a test?

Seventy-two percent of teachers say yes, students are studying English so they can pass a test. But responses from students are not nearly so certain. In fact, student responses indicate that the group is split in two on the issue with roughly half of the students saying *yes* they are studying English to pass the TOEFL or the CAEL, and just under half say *no* they are not (Table 3.). This is not exactly a incontrovertible evidence. And the situation becomes even less conclusive in looking at these figures more closely. In Appendix A we can see that neither those who say *yes* nor those who say *no* were extreme in their responses. In other words, they *agreed* or *disagreed* but they did not commit to these choices by saying *describes me perfectly* or *does not describe me at all*. Are they sitting on the fence; does this reflect a cultural predisposition to avoiding extremes; or is it the truth?

Now, some concerns have been raised about this question. Specifically, that students may have said they were not *studying to pass the CAEL/TOEFL* because they had already passed the CAEL in order to get into the credit program. But what about that group of ESL 130 students who write the CAEL over and over again to see if they can get a high enough score to leapfrog over ESL 150 and ESL 190 to land directly in a mainstream non-ESL academic program? Responses from the teachers suggest that they believe that there are significantly more students of this type in their classes than the student responses might indicate. However, interview data is needed to support this claim.

But, this still doesn't tell us much about motivation. I mean, it is not rocket science to say that students who are motivated by a test – in this case 50 percent of the class – will care more about learning material they know will appear on the test and less about material that will not. But the question is, what should be done about it? Should teachers attempt to build students' understanding of ways in which non-tested content supports tested content? Should teachers reduce non-tested course content and teach only to the test? Or should the test should be adapted to reflect the kinds of material that are currently not being tested?

Regardless, however, the bottom line is that if students do not believe that non-tested content is necessary for them, then their motivation to participate in activities during the non-tested portion of the class will be low.

How does gender affect response?

Surprisingly there is little correlation between gender and other questionnaire items.

QI 13:	I will improve my English most by… • doing many grammar exercises • writing an essay in English
QI 25:	If a student makes a speech error, the teacher must correct it immediately.
QI 34:	Speaking in front of a group.

Figure 9 – Significant correlations between gender and other questionnaire items

With respect to QI 13, 4 percent of females wanted to do grammar exercises compared to 15 percent of males.

With respect to QI 25, it appears that 95 percent of females believe that the teacher must correct the students immediately while the corresponding value for males is 42 percent. From a cultural standpoint, one might ask if females more than males are used to being corrected?

Since only 6 percent of students chose *Speaking in front of a group* as an option, I don't consider the correlation relevant.

How do perceptions about group work and lecture style classes compare?

Analysis of this data does not indicate a correlation between student responses with respect to group work and student responses with respect to lectures. The absence of correlation suggests that there is not a simple binary relationship between these two styles of learning. That is to say, if a

student thinks lectures are the best way to learn a language, this does not mean that he/she thinks group work is the worst.

An interesting correlation exists between QI 24 –*lecture style* is the best way to learn a language – and QI 13 – the choice between *writing an essay* and *grammar exercises*. A closer look at the data reveals that those few students who chose grammar exercises over writing an essay were the same students who *strongly agreed* that the lecture style was the best way to learn English. Interesting.

5.11 Do students and teachers agree on the best strategies for learning English?

Table 5 indicates that teachers consistently underestimate student beliefs about the best strategies for learning English. In three of five categories, student beliefs about best strategies mirrored teacher beliefs. Contrary to what teachers thought they would say, students do not appear to think that doing *grammar exercises* is a good method for learning English. They don't appear to believe that *translating an article from their own language to English* is as useful as *watching TV or listening to the radio*. And they are not quite convinced that *listening to someone explain an English idiom in their own language* is better than *hearing an explanation in English*.

5.12 Yeah, but can I drink coffee?

As far as teachers drinking coffee in class is concerned, caffeine-reliant instructors can relax. Data shows that students do not seem to find that their teacher drinking coffee detracts from their learning process. However, according to students, eating in class rates considerably higher on the scale of inappropriate behaviours. The eating, however, does not seem to bother teachers.

Conclusion

There is a reason shotguns aren't used by snipers. Shotguns fire shells that spread themselves out over a large area and make a pretty big mess. But if you're willing to spit out a few little lead pellets when you're eating, they can be useful in hitting elusive moving targets like ducks, rabbits...and motivations.

And looking back over this analysis I think this research paper has achieved its shotgun objective of rousting and identifying at least some of the issues of motivation contained by the research data. No real solid conclusions, but a fair number of wounded student and teacher beliefs wandering dazed waiting to be put out of their misery by some inspired researcher.

In particular, I would direct future research in this area to the following research questions:

- do students believe that speaking English outside the classroom is actually relevant to their learning and eventual mastery of English?
- do students see value in talking amongst themselves, as a group of L1 speakers, as a method that will help them acquire the English?
- what are some indicators that may help identify students who want to study English but not necessarily use it?
- which characteristics define the motivation of a student who intends to live and work in an English-speaking environment and how do they differ, if at all, from those of a student who intends to return to his/her country of origin to live and work?
- what is the nature of English language use in a workplace in China?
- are there significant differences in motivation and language learning strategies between students born under the Single Child Policy and those who were not?
- what does it mean to a Chinese student to learn a language *perfectly* and what are the consequences of this motivation?
- how do tests influence motivation to learn and long-term mastery of English by Chinese students?
- how can students motivated by testing alone, be encouraged to take a more holistic view toward learning?
- what can be done to strengthen students' sense of ownership in their own language learning process?
- and finally, how do teachers' perceptions of student beliefs influence teaching?

But don't imagine for one minute that tracking down answers to these questions is going to be easy.

Motivation is a cunning prey, elusive and master of disguise. And the trail is often confusing and we may find, after several kilometers, that we have lost the scent. But the payoff is there for those of us who persevere. Because by increasing our awareness about how student motivation works - Chinese or otherwise –and by identifying gaps where what teachers think students are thinking and what students are actually thinking do not match up, we can put teachers and entire programs in a better position to both understand their students' needs and to address them accurately.