

# Behavioral Changes in Second Language Learners of Mandarin

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# **Behavioral Changes in Second Language Learners of Mandarin**

Emily Ryan

## ***Abstract***

*Events that occur during spoken interactions with native speakers may prove discouraging or encouraging enough to cause noticeable behavioral changes within a second language learner. The following research study seeks out evidence in support of this claim from 19 American learners of Mandarin who entered the People's Republic of China in July of 2006 as EFL volunteers. Questionnaires were administered via email approximately 16 months after the participants had entered China in order to elicit information as to when second language learners felt most discouraged or encouraged during spoken interactions with native speakers. Questionnaires were then analyzed to find whether these specific moments of discouragement or encouragement led to behavioral changes, and if in turn they caused an increase or decrease in second language learning activity.*

## ***Introduction***

It is likely that every language learner can reflect upon a time when he/she was tremendously frustrated or incredibly motivated during the second language learning process. These feelings of frustration and motivation may stem from an array of different emotional factors and states, such as anxiety or elation. However, these moments of frustration and motivation may also stem from specific events that occur while interacting in the second language.

Specifically, spoken interaction events in which a language learner attempts face-to-face second language exchange with a native speaker may cause intense feelings of discouragement or encouragement. Moreover, these spoken events may be discouraging or encouraging enough to change the behavior that accompanies language learning. Furthermore, many of these behavioral changes stem from specific moments during the spoken interactions that occur between second language learners and native speakers of the second language.

In this research study, one particular group of American learners of Mandarin living in the People's Republic of China as teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) volunteers were surveyed for information about experiences of discouragement and encouragement during their spoken interactions with native speakers of Mandarin. Whether or not these feelings of discouragement and encouragement caused any noticeable behavioral changes following the interaction was then examined. Two research questions arose:

1. How do second language learners living abroad define sources of discouragement and encouragement during spoken interactions with native speakers?
2. Do these moments of discouragement and encouragement during spoken interactions with native speakers cause noticeable behavioral changes in the second language learning process?

A questionnaire was administered which defined *discouragement* and *encouragement* for the participants; thus, *discouragement* and *encouragement* will be defined as such for the purpose of this study: discouragement can depress one's motivation to improve his/her ability, while encouragement can spur on one's motivation to improve his/her ability. The 19 participants provided detailed accounts of spoken interactions with native speakers that caused enough discouragement or encouragement to significantly change the behavior that accompanied their language

learning; i.e., the language learning strategies of the participant changed noticeably through an increase or decrease of spoken activity in the second language, due to discouragement and encouragement, as defined above.

### ***Literature on Behavioral Changes in Second Language Learning***

In seeking out research that explicitly defines changes in language learning behavior stemming from discouraging and/or encouraging moments during spoken interactions, some difficulty arises finding much in the way of previous studies. However, while these events have not been explicitly defined as behavioral changes stemming from spoken interactions, several examples of these changes within previous language learning literature are present.

In her study on social identities and investment in language learning, Norton Peirce (1996) used qualitative data from case studies and diary research that exhibited second language learning behavioral changes within foreign language learners of English living in Canada. Norton Peirce claimed that the language learners in her study were “not fixed,” but instead faced sites of “struggle and changed dramatically over time...” (1996, p. 16).

One of the subjects was Martina, a Czechoslovakian immigrant who moved to Canada in 1989 with her family, but who did not speak English when she arrived. Although she eventually enrolled in an ESL course, she described feeling “uncomfortable using English in the group of people whose English language is their mother tongue because they speak fluently without any problems and I feel inferior” (Norton Peirce, 1996, p. 21). An excellent example of a noticeable behavior change in this study occurred when two of Martina’s very young co-workers (native speakers of English) made faces at her when she called to them (in English) for help with customers. This discouraging moment in the spoken interaction caused Martina

to take initiative to acquire the correct forms in order to address customers in English without the aid of her co-workers, thus showing an increase in activity within the second language.

In a similar diary study that focused on foreign language learning and identity reconstruction, Kinginger (2004) introduced Alice, an American determined to learn French while living abroad. From diary excerpts as well as interviews, Alice recalls her struggles and successes in learning French in both Quebec and France. Although the study focuses more on Alice's processes of learning than on specific spoken interactions, one specific discouraging spoken interaction can be identified as causing behavioral changes in that it added to Alice's severe depression while living abroad. Alice described the following brief experience:

...then I had this experience where I was already down, I was walking into a tobacco store and umm, I passed this man on the street...and so I smiled and said bonjour – he crossed the street. He freaked out and crossed the street so it just made it even worse (Kinging, 2004, p. 233).

The rebuff was just one of many that led Alice to experience a noticeable change in that she began to disdain France, its people, and its culture, and in turn, abandoned her language classes, and at worst, exhibited suicidal behavior.

Perhaps the most well documented case of a second language learning behavior change is Schmidt and Frota's account of "R," a language learner of Portuguese living in Brazil (Schmidt and Frota, 1986). Through a vast collection of personal diary entries, R was able to pinpoint many specific events that caused him to make changes as to how he would learn Portuguese. In one particular case, R was first enrolled in a Portuguese course, and when that course ended, decided to enroll again. Schmidt explains, "R planned to reenroll in a Portuguese language class when

the next term began, but after the first day decided to drop out and try to learn the language through interaction alone” (Schmidt and Frota, 1986, p. 246). In this case, from his diary account, one finds that the event responsible for R dropping out of the class was a discouraging spoken interaction with his instructor (Y):

What really bothered me most was that Y speaks so rapidly that I didn't understand much of what she said at all. She apologized for it, said that everyone tells her she speaks much faster than most native speakers, but she can't control it. I don't know what to do about the situation...I'm tempted to drop completely (Schmidt and Frota, 1986, p. 246).

As illustrated by this passage and the studies cited above, spoken interactions can cause such discouragement in language learners as to create such noticeable behavior changes, such as taking initiative to greet customers in the second language, taking on disdainful attitudes of native speakers, and dropping language classes. On the other hand, moments of extreme encouragement can also create behavioral changes within learners. Schmidt and Frota's R had one such social interaction with Brazilians he met in a restaurant. Being encouraged by his progress in spoken interactions allowed R to change his behavior in how he conversed with native speakers of Portuguese:

...I am not so discouraged anymore. Even when my Arabic was at its best, I still couldn't follow [native speaker to native speaker] conversations a lot of the time. I think the biggest help has been interacting with lots of people regularly at the Trattoria. There I don't restrict myself to highly negotiated one-on-one conversations, but really strain to hear what everyone is saying (Schmidt and Frota, 1986, p. 248).

Like the examples in the above literature, it was hoped that the participants in this study would offer descriptions of what events make spoken interactions with native speakers discouraging and/or encouraging, as well as insightful accounts of behavioral changes through decreases or increases of second language spoken activity stemming from these interactions.

### ***Participants***

Originally, 46 TEFL volunteers were contacted for the purpose of this study; however, only 21 responses were received, two of which (participants 9 and 14) were later eliminated due to the difference in their responses. The remaining 19 participants were American citizens who arrived in the People's Republic of China as TEFL volunteers on July 1, 2006. At the time of the survey, the ages of the participants ranged from 22 to 33 years. Of these participants, nine were male, and ten were female. The near equal division of participants by gender was not intentional; the participant pool was naturally divided as such. The sampling strategy did not become sub-divided from the participant population on the basis of age, gender, or province, as there were no recognizable differences between the responses from the two groups.

The participants spent a little over two months in the city of Chengdu in Sichuan province enrolled in an intensive Mandarin language program (focusing solely on speaking and listening), in which they were in classrooms of small groups of four students for four hours each weekday morning. During this time, all of the participants lived with Chinese host families as a means of cultural integration and language immersion. After this two-month period, four of these participants remained in Sichuan province (two males (M), two females (F)) while the rest were sent to teaching sites in separate provinces of China: Guizhou – five participants (2M,

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3F); Gansu – eight participants (5M, 3F); and the municipality of Chongqing – two participants (2F) (please see Table 1 for the distribution of males and females within the four provinces).

Table 1: Participants (n=19), region and gender

	Chonqing	Gansu	Guizhou	Sichuan
Male (M)		5	2	2
Female (F)	2	3	3	2

At this point, the participants were given an additional stipend to hire a private Mandarin tutor in order to continue independently with their language studies. As no differences could be detected within the responses of these four provinces, a sampling strategy recognizing differences between each provincial subgroup from which to analyze data was unnecessary.

The participants were selected as they all entered China at the same time, and at the time of the study, had been at their individual sites for over one year. None of the participants had lived in China previously (two of the original participants – participants 9 and 14, both female – had lived in China prior, and as their questionnaires differed greatly from the other respondents, as mentioned earlier, they were eliminated for the purpose of this study), and only three of the participants had studied Mandarin prior to coming to China, but each for only two months.

Participants self-assessed their second language speaking ability with the ACTFL scale, which is used by the TEFL organization they volunteered for. All participants assessed themselves as novice beginners upon entering China, even the three participants who had had two months of previous Mandarin training before coming to China. However, the self-assessment of the participants' second language ability

at time of this study (more than one year after their entry into China) varied greatly (please see Table 2 for these self-assessment responses).

Table 2: Self-assessment by participants after 1 year, using ACTFL scale (M= male, F= female)

	Novice Beginner	Novice Mid	Novice High	Intermediate Low	Intermediate Mid	Intermediate High	Advanced Low
Chongqing							2F
Gansu			1M	3F	1M	2M	1M
Guizhou				1M, 1F		2F, 1M	
Sichuan	1M			1F	1M	1F	

The majority of the participants assessed their speaking ability in the intermediate categories; however, there were a few participants who assessed themselves as having an advanced low speaking ability, while one participant felt he was a high novice, and one other had assessed himself as making no progress at all in his speaking ability. It is important to note for the following sections, however, that those participants who placed themselves noticeably above the majority of participants did not show discernable differences in their responses about discouragement/encouragement from those in the intermediate categories, as one might expect.

### ***Instrumentation and Analysis Procedures***

As mentioned briefly in the preceding section, a 12-item questionnaire was implemented for the sake of this research project. By using survey research, specifically questionnaires, patterns could be detected from the participants' answers by using a combination of both closed and open-ended items.

A variety of open-ended questions were created for the sake of this questionnaire. Sentence completion questions (Dörnyei, 2003, p. 47) were utilized in order to ask

the participant when he/she feels most discouraged or encouraged while speaking with native speakers, and again in order to elicit information about the perceived changes in the participants' second language learning behavior. Additionally, short-answer questions were used that asked participants to recall a specific spoken interaction during which they felt discouraged or encouraged. The most varied data was anticipated from these two questions.

Once it was identified that no distinct differences existed between participants according to gender, province, age, or second language speaking ability, all closed item questions regarding discouragement were tallied, and open-ended items summarized and categorized by participant number. The same was then completed for encouragement closed items and open-ended items. From this, it was hoped that patterns would begin to emerge for either discouragement or encouragement.

## ***Findings***

### ***Sources of Discouragement***

In order to elicit information about discouraging moments during spoken interactions in the second language with native speakers, using a Lickert scale, participants were first asked if they agreed or disagreed that discouraging moments occurred in these interactions. Approximately two-thirds of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they felt discouraged during some spoken interactions, and although about one-third of the participants did not agree, interestingly enough, they still provided examples of discouraging interactions in later responses. It is also important to note that the participants who disagreed or strongly disagreed that discouraging moments occurred during spoken interactions did not necessarily assess themselves as any higher in spoken second language ability than those who did agree with the statement (The distribution of these responses can be seen in Table 3).

Table 3:

Responses to Question 5 (M = male, F = female): *When I speak Mandarin with a native speaker, there are moments when I feel **discouraged** by my second language ability.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Chongqing		1F		1F	
Gansu	1M	1M, 1F		2M, 1F	1M, 1F
Guizhou	1F			1M	1M, 2F
Sichuan		1F		1M	1M, 1F

The questionnaire then asked participants to complete an open-ended statement that described when they felt most discouraged during spoken interactions with native speakers. Although 14 distinguishable categories were derived from the participant responses in which several provided more than one example, participants cited the following sources as being most discouraging during spoken interactions with native speakers (the number of participants citing these moments is included in parentheses): native speakers not understanding them when they spoke (five participants); not being able to understand the native speaker's local dialect (five participants); not being able to have a meaningful conversation (four participants); native speakers speaking too fast (three participants); and native speakers ignoring the participant's second language ability (three participants).

Other categories (cited by two participants) that provided discouragement as stemming from native speakers were: being corrected or laughed at by native speakers; feeling that native speakers did not take the time to listen to them; and having an inability to express themselves due to their limited vocabulary. Sources of discouragement as cited by only one participant included: the inability to understand the native speaker; the inability to master tones; the native speaker speaking

unclearly; the native speaker appearing annoyed or impatient with the participant; and native speakers commenting on the participant's slow progress.

### ***Discouraging Spoken Interactions and Behavioral Changes***

The questionnaire asked participants to recall a specific spoken interaction in which they felt discouraged (please see Table 4 for summaries of participant responses and behavioral changes). As expected, the recollections were extremely varied. However, when looking at the responses in which participants recalled the behavioral changes in their spoken interactions after the specific spoken event, some patterns began to emerge. Each behavioral change was assigned a “+” or “-” (or both, in cases where more than change was reported, or none if no change was reported) to signify an increase or decrease in second language activity of the participant. It is important to note that the “+” or “-” does not imply a positive or negative change in the sense that these changes were “good” or “bad.”

In examining the 18 responses (participant 1 did not answer these two questions, and 9 and 14 have been eliminated, as addressed previously), one can see that 17 of the 18 responses indicated that a behavioral change did take place after the specific discouraging interaction(s), and of those changes, 7 of the 24 total changes reported created an increase in activity within the second language, while 17 of them reported a decrease in activity within the second language.

Of the few discouraging events that that created increases in spoken second language activity (+), participants reported changes in their study habits, including: learning new vocabulary to avoid future un-“fluid” conversations; focusing more on tones during studying; “working harder” to learn the second language; and changing their pronunciation to “mirror” local dialects. Additionally, participants reported coming prepared with printouts and written information for difficult encounters

Table 4: Summary of specific discouraging spoken interactions and behavioral change(s) following (NS = native speaker).

(“+” represents an increase in activity with the second language (L2); “-” represents a decrease in activity with the L2)

Participant	Specific Discouraging Spoken Interaction	Behavioral Change	(+/-)
2	Old woman at bus station spoke dialect; participant could not understand; lady laughed	Did not study as much because of frustration with dialect	-
3	Tibet –discussion with local monk; could not have a ‘fluid’ conversation.	Communicated less during the day; learned lacking vocabulary for future use	- +
4	Train station – chaotic, yelling, dialects	Came more prepared with printouts and characters written down	+
5	Taxi – gave driver clear and accurate directions; driver chose to ignore him until NS gave directions	Had NS friends speak; did not practice speaking	-
6	Conversation with NS; both parties gave up when NS could not understand L2 speaker	Did not have conversations with NS strangers unless necessary (shopping, etc.)	-
7	Gym – NSs could not understand her when she attempted to renew membership; began talking louder to her	Did not talk to NSs for the rest of the day	-
8	Taxi – was unable to explain to the driver how to get home due to dialect differences; had to find another taxi driver who spoke standard Mandarin	Changed pronunciation to “mirror” local dialect	+
10	Culture as a whole – people staring, saying “hello” too much	Motivation to “work harder” at the second language	+
11	Taxi – conversation with driver with familiar questions; yet could only respond with a word or two	Talked to strangers less; but talked more with friends who recognized second language ability	- +
12	Participant’s student commented on lack of second language progress after one year	Did not speak Mandarin with people unless tutor/friend	-

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13	Stopped to confront NS who shouted <i>laowai</i> (foreigner); crowd gathered; began laughing at participant	Did not talk to NS strangers afterwards	-
15	Train station – agent sold participant wrong ticket; she went to complain; agent ignored her; when she asked for manager, agent began throwing things at her and screaming	Became wary of talking to NS, and did not go “out of way” to talk to them; did not challenge herself in interacting – used simpler vocabulary; always checked NS for comprehension by asking if they understood	- - +
16	Colleague asked participant to speak English only; had no patience for her Mandarin	Only spoke English with colleagues; stopped exploring L2 - used simpler phrases in L2	- -
17	Ordered bread at hot pot, but mistakenly said “bread slice” waitress did not understand; participant felt waitress must have understood with simple difference in vocabulary	Became less apt to order in restaurants	-
18	NS could not understand participant because of tones	Focused more on tones during studying	+
19	Tutor appeared bored and unable to understand participant	Spoke English primarily – Mandarin only when necessary; stopped tutoring; did not study L2 for five months	- - -
20	Airport – two taxis overcharged her; tried to catch third taxi, but he could not understand her – would not take her home; taxi driver told friend participant spoke bad Chinese	[No change reported]	
21	Student commented on participant’s lack of progress and interest in Mandarin	Did not study on a regular basis; was not interested or engaged in Mandarin	-

in places such as train stations, speaking more with friends who recognized their second language ability, and constantly checking native speakers' comprehension during conversations by asking questions such as, "Do you understand?"

Of the many behavioral changes that caused decreases in spoken second language ability, one behavioral change seemed prevalent in that it was present in eight of the participants' responses. These participants reported not speaking Mandarin to strangers anymore unless absolutely necessary; in some cases, speaking only with native speaker friends or tutors who recognized their second language ability. One female participant from Guizhou (participant 15) even reported feeling wary of strangers after a particularly traumatic incident at a train station in which a station agent began throwing things at her when she complained about a ticket mistake. A male participant (participant 13) reported not talking to strangers anymore because of an incident in which he confronted a native speaker for yelling *laowai* (foreigner) at him, at which point a crowd grew who began laughing at everything the participant said.

While ceasing spoken activity with strangers unless necessary stood out as a primary cause for a decrease in spoken second language activity, other responses that were reported by more than one respondent were: communicating less or not speaking for the rest of the day; using simpler phrases and vocabulary; not studying as much, or in one case, ceasing studying all together for five months; and speaking primarily English.

### ***Sources of Encouragement***

In order to seek out information from the participants about encouragement, alongside the discouragement questions, four parallel questions were asked. Like discouragement, participants were first asked if they agreed or disagreed that encouraging moments existed in these interactions. With one female participant from

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Gansu as an exception (she answered neutrally), nearly all of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that there were encouraging moments during spoken interactions in the second language with native speakers (please see Table 5).

Table 5:

Responses to Question 6 (M = male, F = female): *When I speak Mandarin with a native speaker, there are moments when I feel **encouraged** by my second language ability.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Chongqing				2F	
Gansu			1F	4M, 1F	1M, 1F
Guizhou				2M, 3F	
Sichuan				2M, 2F	

The questionnaire asked participants to complete an open-ended statement that described when they felt most encouraged during spoken interactions with native speakers. Approximately 16 distinguishable categories were derived from the participant responses in which several provided more than one example. Participants primarily cited the following sources as being most encouraging during spoken interactions with native speakers (the number of participants citing these moments is again included in parentheses): understanding the majority of what was said, or the “gist” of the conversation (eight participants); being understood by the native speaker (six participants); receiving compliments or praise from native speakers (four participants); sensing enjoyment from the native speaker during the conversation (three participants); sensing patience from the native speaker during the conversation (three participants); expressing their thoughts clearly to the native speaker (three participants); and finally, being able to sustain a good, or meaningful, conversation (three participants).

Other sources of encouragement (cited by two participants) included: being able to respond to the native speaker; and being directly taught new words or being offered a linguistic explanation by the native speaker. Sources of encouragement as cited by only one participant included: understanding words, not just context; the use of standard Mandarin by native speakers; slow speech on the part of the native speaker; learning new vocabulary or structures during conversation; using what had been learned during studying within a conversation; reaching the intended result of the conversation; and finally, recognizing parallels between the first and second languages.

### ***Encouraging Spoken Interactions and Behavioral Changes***

18 participants responded (participant 10 did not answer these two questions) to questions eliciting information for specific encouraging spoken events and whether or not a behavioral change followed. Again, each behavioral change was assigned a “+” or “-” (or both, in cases where more than change was reported, or none if no change was reported) to signify an increase or decrease in second language activity of the participant. In Table 6, one can see that 15 of the 18 responses indicated that a behavioral change did take place after the specific encouraging interaction(s), and of those changes, 19 of the 20 total changes reported created an increase in activity within the second language, while only one of them reported a decrease in activity within the second language.

Although many of the participants reported a change in their emotional state (e.g., gaining more confidence, feeling less nervous) from the specific encouraging spoken interaction, most of these emotional changes were accompanied by a behavioral change, such as practicing speaking with native speakers without embarrassment, or becoming more “brave to just chat” when approaching native speakers. Two

participants (17 and 20) reported becoming “more willing” to speak the second language with strangers and “tackle” conversations, while three other participants (2, 7, and 17) reported an increase in studying; one female participant in Chongqing (participant 2) even reported immediately going home to study after successful conversations she had with Chongqing taxi drivers. Two other participants (1 and 16, females from Chongqing and Guizhou, respectively) reported actually seeking out conversations with native speakers; participant 16 reported seeking out specific native speakers to have “fun” conversations with (e.g., old people, children, shop owners) after fruitful conversations she had had with an old woman who sewed outside her apartment.

While many of the participants reported an increase in their spoken activity with native speakers and less apprehension in doing so, the length of time that this increase lasted was not stated. However, participants 3 and 19 (two males from Gansu and Sichuan, respectively) both cited a specific encouraging spoken interaction that occurred while traveling, and then reported confidently using Mandarin, but only for the remainder of their trip. Participant 19 even reported that while he had actively used Mandarin for the rest of his trip after a lengthy three-hour conversation with a sleepy taxi driver as a means of keeping him awake, he “completely abandoned” the second language after returning home, returning to using only English.

It is interesting to note that participant 21 (a male from Sichuan) reported no change in his behavior, as well as a continual lack of use of the second language, even after receiving praise from his students about his second language ability. This response was very similar to his description of his behavior after receiving discouraging comments from his students on his second language ability, and curiously, this was the participant who responded that his ACTFL level has not changed over the course

Table 6: Summary of specific encouraging spoken interactions and behavioral change(s) following (NS = native speaker).

(“+” represents an increase in activity with the second language (L2); “-” represents a decrease in activity with the L2)

Participant	Specific Encouraging Spoken Interaction	Behavioral Change	(+/-)
1	On bus – sat and listened to conversations even though people did not speak to her	Sought out more conversations; performed transactions to use L2	+
2	Taxis in Chongqing – talked with drivers who like to talk, compliment, are friendly	Immediately went home and studied	+
3	Talked to monk on holy pilgrimage for two hours	Confidently spoke to NS for rest of trip without concern for mistakes or grammar	+
4	Beijing – had to get directions somewhere; understood NS completely and arrived at destination successfully	Gained more confidence to approach NSs	+
5	Beijing – cab driver spoke for an hour; taught new vocabulary, appeared patient with participant	Gained more confidence, but no noticeable behavioral change	
6	Exchanged three train tickets at station; pronunciation was complimented	Become more “brave to just chat”	+
7	Having an in-depth conversation with Chinese friend about finding a wife; did not understand words, pulled out dictionary and studied with friend	Began studying more – 20 new phrases per week; learned characters to begin text messaging in Hanzi	++
8	Successfully ordered food at a restaurant for friends	Spoke more quickly	+
11	While traveling, locals began asking original, unfamiliar questions; participant understood them	Lost nervousness to ask NSs for what he needs	+

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12	Restaurant – while ordering, waitress spoke very fast to tell her item was unavailable, “like a normal conversation”	Ordered at restaurant every time afterwards	+
13	Tutor spoke extremely fast; could understand what she was saying	Attempted “real” conversations with NS; practices speaking more without embarrassment	+ +
15	Spoke to seamstress; ordered exactly what she wanted; had to wait 30 minutes for order, during which time participant struck up conversation in L2 with worker about cultural differences amongst women	[No change reported]	
16	Older woman outside apartment who sewed, talked with participant while she ate ice cream; taught participant new vocabulary and patiently listened	Found specific people (e.g., children, old people, store owners) to interact with to make conversations “fun” in daily encounters	+
17	Beijing – “good” conversation with taxi driver	Became more willing to speak in the L2 with people he did not know; was eager to study more upon returning home	+ +
18	Spoke to locals on the street	Stopped being “shy” to talk to NSs	+
19	Hainan – as a way of “staying alive” by keeping driver awake, had lengthy conversation for over three hours	Actively used Mandarin the rest of the trip; however, completely abandoned it when returning home, speaking only to English speakers.	+ -
20	Had bought tickets from Air China, but needed to return them – very detailed problem to explain; no one spoke English, was able to communicate problem in L2	Became more willing to try speaking and “tackle” conversations; used phrases/ vocabulary she thought too difficult in past	+ +
21	Students commenting on participant’s improvements in the L2	No change – still only uses L2 for necessary encounters	

of the year while living in China. However, whether or not behavioral changes stemming from discouraging/encouraging moments led to progress in the second language is not something that can be supported from the statements of this one individual.

### ***Conclusions***

In reviewing the findings from the questionnaires of these 19 participants, one can see that several recommendations can be made for second language learners living abroad; especially those who rely heavily on the spoken aspects of the second language from their language training experience, such as these Mandarin learners in China.

To begin with, in reviewing participants' responses regarding discouragement, it can first be said that it might be helpful to train second language learners in how to better identify and deal with moments of discouragement during spoken interactions with native speakers, as it appears that a good portion of participants agreed that these moments are prevalent in their interactions. Similarly, language training programs in the host country, such as the one the TEFL volunteers took part in before going to their individual sites, might be redesigned and improved by including specific dialect training, for example.

Additionally, second language learners may benefit from cultural training to understand why some native speakers pretend not to understand or ignore the second language ability of the learner, for example, in order not to feel so discouraged by it. Moreover, learners such as these 19 TEFL volunteers might be more successful if they are enabled to recognize what kind of spoken interactions are providing these feelings of discouragement, as well as identifying what changes are stemming from them. For example, through reflection of discouragement, a second language learner may be trained to recognize that his being laughed at by a crowd of native speakers

has forced him to retreat from spoken activities with native speaker strangers. He might be enabled, through careful training, to develop a strategy to avoid this type of encounter, rather than decreasing his amount of spoken activity, which may become a detriment to his progress in the second language.

Conversely, should second language learners be enabled to recognize moments of encouragement during spoken interactions with native speakers, they may be able to track what changes in their behavior led to success in their second language learning progress. As shown by the findings, approximately all of the learners in this study agreed or strongly agreed that encouraging moments occurred in the spoken interactions and approximately the same amount identified an increase in spoken activity after specific interactions with native speakers. Therefore, it would seem beneficial that these learners first be trained to identify what types of interactions are sources of encouragement so that they may engage themselves in these interactions in future encounters with native speakers. By using second language learning questionnaires such as the one administered for this study, or by persuading learners to keep journals of spoken interactions with native speakers that occur during daily encounters, instructors could foster language awareness and promote learner autonomy in the second language.

By enabling second language learners to notice the sources of discouragement or encouragement, and by identifying specific discouraging and encouraging spoken interactions with native speakers, they may be better able to identify what behavioral changes led to detriment and success in their second language learning processes. Furthermore, these reflections would be far more meaningful and useful for their learning if they could examine specific examples from their second language learning experience.

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