

Negotiating identity and English performative competence: Uyghur students in tertiary education in China

Xiaoyan (Grace) Guo and Mingyue (Michelle) Gu
Faculty of Education, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Informed by the notions of performativity and performative competence, this study explores the process by which a group of internal-migrant Uyghur students develop their performative competence and the way they negotiate their identities during English language learning and usage. Data collected from interviews and observations suggest that Uyghur students are able to contest the unfavourable identity attributed to them from their own English language learning contexts and trajectories. These students are found to improve their English performative competence by strategically drawing on heritage linguistic resources. Moreover, they develop their performative competence by adopting multimodal linguistic resources. The performative competence is found to allow participants to perform a metropolitan identity. The implications of findings for relevant stake holders are discussed.

Keywords: English performative competence; identity; Uyghur students

Introduction

An increasing number of studies have explored ethnic minorities' identity construction and negotiation in relation to their linguistic practice, in the context of migration. One body of studies examines how multilingual ethnic diasporas (sharing the same ethnicity but with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds) display and negotiate their identities in interactions through multilingual practices (e.g., English, heritage language) in the host society (e.g., Canagarajah, 2013a; Canagarajah, 2013b; Creese & Blackledge, 2015; Gu, forthcoming; Li, 2014). Other researchers look at the ways in which immigrants with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds negotiate and perform "selves" through interactions in multilingual environments (e.g., Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008; Miller, 2009). Another group of researchers focus on the influences of popular cultural forms, virtual space, and the global spread of English among transnational minority youth in expression of their identifications and desirable identities (e.g., Ibrahim, 1999; Pennycook, 2003).

These previous studies have shown that the multilingual resources of multilingual minorities enable them to strategically contest their disadvantageous positions during English language learning, and achieve favourable membership through creative linguistic performance (Canagarajah, 2013b; Gu, forthcoming). However, they have focused mainly on transnational minorities in Western contexts. China is a multi-ethnic and multicultural country, hosting 55 officially recognized ethnic minority groups, a majority of whom are multilingual speakers (Adamson, Feng, Liu, & Li, 2013; Feng, 2012). Every year there are around 7,000 minority students who move from Xinjiang, which is located in north-western China, to mid-eastern cities for education, owing to a national education programme¹ (Ministry of Education, 2010). The paramount

importance assigned to English in post-secondary education in China and the English language educational gap between regions and social groups may present both opportunities and challenges for ethnic minority students' identity negotiation (Adamson et al., 2013). Therefore, it is important to examine the ways in which educated minority elites perform their identities in relation to their English language learning and usage in the host context. Drawing on notion of performative competence, a practice-based form of competence including knowledge and strategies of responding to changing and unexpected contexts (Canagarajah, 2013b), this study examines the process by which individual language learners/users develop their linguistic performances and negotiate their identities. Focusing on a group of Uyghur (the dominant ethnic group in Xinjiang) university students, the following question will be addressed:

How do Uyghur students develop their performative competence, and negotiate and perform their identities, in the process of learning and using the English language in the host context?

Performativity and performative competence

Informed by Butler's (1990) notion of gender as performativity, Pennycook (2004) developed the concept of performativity to reconceptualise the relationship between identity and language, particularly English. Performativity can be understood as "the way in which we perform acts of identity as an ongoing series of social and cultural performances rather than as the expression of prior identity" (Pennycook, 2004, p. 8). A performative perspective views identity as formed through linguistic performance and discursive practice rather than decided by pre-given discourses (Pennycook, 2004). In other words, identity is constructed and negotiated through drawing upon semiotic resources and performing speech acts.

The performativity lens understands language in terms of local practices, whose functions and meaning are generated through engagement in situated social practices and local linguistic attitudes and linguistic ideologies (Pennycook, 2004). The fact that 80% of all English speakers around the world are non-native speakers (Jenkins, 2009; Seidlhofer, 2004) argues against traditional understandings of English in terms of linguistic imperialism; instead, it suggests examining how actors appropriate English as a resource to play roles in situated and specific sociocultural contexts (Li & Zhu, 2013; Pennycook, 2004). Understanding identity and identity formation from the perspective of performativity enables us to explore how Uyghur university students negotiate their social positions and perform their identities.

Canagarajah (2013b) defined performative competence as the communication procedure knowledge one develops in and through practice, and the dynamic and reciprocal strategies individuals adopt to facilitate their identity construction and negotiation across speech communities. In accordance with the notion of performativity, performative competence focuses on language as a practice, in which both language-for-learning and language-in-use are linguistic resources for achieving a social purpose. Alignment is the key characteristic of performative competence, and procedure knowledge its major component, one which is further elaborated to include the concept of starting from one's own positionality; in other words, learners use English, negotiate on equal terms, reshape norms and the expansion of repertoires. Canagarajah (2013b) found that skilled migrants with performative competence can develop a frontline language awareness and adopt a set of learning strategies they frequently employed to

negotiate a positive social position, including learning from practice, adaptive skills and use of scaffolding. The notion of performative competence will inform the present study as to how elite Uyghur students develop their English performative competence by drawing upon the linguistic and cultural resources at their disposal and mapping out strategies for and during their English language learning and use.

The study

Research context

The fifty-five officially recognized minority groups in China, with the exception of the Manchu and the Hui, use over 80 languages (Adamson et al., 2013). As the national language, Chinese (simplified Chinese characters as the standard written form; Putonghua as the standard spoken form) has been promoted through the country's education system in an attempt to form a unified national identity (Lam, 2005). Minority languages are accorded legal status and are officially protected by government policies; in practice, however, they are marginalized and limited in use (Lam, 2005). English has been feverishly promoted through education and is taking on growing importance in public life, particularly in socioeconomic centres like Shanghai and Beijing (Feng, 2012). While English has, since 2001, been a stipulated subject for Han (the majority population) students, offered from Primary 3 onward (Feng, 2012), minority students living in socioeconomically impoverished regions have limited access to English due to lack of resources (Adamson et al., 2013). Nevertheless, English continues to play a critical role in higher education; English proficiency is essential for accessing overseas exchange programmes, academic activities, further education, employment, and other social and economic activities (Lam, 2005).

Against this backdrop, the research was conducted in a highly ranked university (anonymized as Zhendan University) in Shanghai, a key socioeconomic and financial centre in China, where English has a high prestige. While more than half of the university's undergraduates are local Shanghaiese, nearly 35% of the students come from other parts of China and around 15% are international students. There are 30 or so Uyghur students enrolled each year, allocated to different faculties and majors. While Chinese is the primary medium of instruction, English has been moving towards paramount importance as the university seeks to enhance its international status. As an example, the proportion of English-medium lectures has been rising and students now need to pass a university-based high-stakes English test to graduate.

Data collection and analysis

The study reported here is part of a larger project that explores minority students' identity through multilingual practice in mainland China. Participants in this study were a group of Uyghur undergraduate students speaking Uyghur as their native language admitted in different years and to different majors. Participants had quite diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds and experiences. With respect to their English language learning backgrounds, those who attended special boarding schools set up for minority students from Xinjiang in cities outside Xinjiang, learned English and were tested during college entrance exams alongside their Han counterparts. By contrast, those who attended bilingual classes (taught in Mandarin and their first language) in high schools in Xinjiang (mainly in Urumchi, the capital city) received limited English education but their level of proficiency in English was not part of the college entry requirement.

Participants were recruited using a snowball approach, as the first author came to know the key participant (S1) in 2012, when she was a student teacher; through S1's introductions, 13 Uyghur students volunteered to participate in this study. The participant profile is set out in Table 1, below. The data used for the study were collected in 2013 and 2014. Three to five rounds of semi-structured interviews were mainly conducted with participants in Putonghua, the lingua franca between the students and the first author (who conducted the interviews), with sporadic code-switching to English and Uyghur, each one lasting between one and two hours. The interview questions seek information regarding participants' English language learning experiences both in and out of classrooms (e.g., their learning strategies, the perceived advantages and difficulty in English-learning, and the learning resources), their views of the status of English, and the influences of English on them (see the interview protocol in the appendix). To counterbalance the power relations between the interviewer and interviewees, the participants were encouraged to provide full and extensive information rather than give concise answers to specific questions. The participants could also talk freely about their English language learning experiences. Guidance was provided, to a minimal extent, only if they strayed too far away from the main topic. All interviews were audio-recorded. All interview data were transcribed by an independent researcher who is bilingual in Chinese and English, and re-read by the first author. Any parts they disagreed on were discussed to ensure that no distortion existed in the translations.

Table 1 Participants' information

Participants	Gender	Major	Pre-university educational context
S1	M	Information Security	Boarding school
S2	M	Information Security	Bilingual class
S3	M	Cultural Heritage and Museology	Boarding school
S4	M	Public Service and Administration	Boarding school
S5	M	Public Service and Administration	Boarding school
S6	M	Pharmacy	Boarding school
S7	M	Clinical Medicine	Boarding school
S8	F	Clinical Medicine	Boarding school
S9	F	Public Service and Administration	Bilingual class
S10	F	International Trade	Bilingual class
S11	F	Clinical Medicine	Boarding school
S12	F	Nursing	Boarding school
S13	F	Clinical Medicine	Boarding school

Despite the great potential for interviews to elicit deeper personal insights from the participants, the presence of the interviewer may also deter the participants from responding candidly and restrain the participants from fully presenting their own voices. Therefore, observations, which can access a greater range of the participants'

experiences, have been conducted in the tangible learning community of the participants and in the virtual online e-community of Wechat (a leading Chinese-version social networking programme which functions as a semi-public platform for postings and discussions). Field notes and data from Wechat were filed for analysis. The interview accounts and the actual English practice documented through observations allowed for an in-depth understanding of participants' subjectivity negotiation.

An inductive and iterative content analysis process (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002) was employed in which data were read repeatedly to generate impressions, and then coded and evaluated against the concept of performativity and the components of performative competence. It was found that participants were skilful at contesting and performing their identities and employed practical ways of learning English. Three specific themes emerged: contestation of unfavourable identities, starting from their own positionality; improvement of English performative competence using heritage resources; and, learning English from and for practice and performing an urban youth identity. The data extracts that represent the findings in terms of the above three categories were selected and analysed. The analytic categories and interpretations were checked with the participants both formally and informally and opportunities to add further information were provided.

Findings

Contestation of participants' unfavourable identities from their own positionality

Zhendan University administers an English proficiency test to freshmen each year, right after they enter the university, to determine the band of College English course² to which they are to be allocated, with Band 1 being the lowest level, Band 2 the middle and Band 3 the highest. When the initial fieldwork was conducted, all students except one were attending the course; one participant was in Band 3, three participants in Band 2, and the remaining eight in Band 1.

Although Uyghur students were unfavourably positioned in Zhendan University due to their relatively low English proficiency compared with that of their Han counterparts, little resistance to English was found among participants. The data analysis shows they were able to contest their disadvantageous positions, as is shown in the following interview excerpt:

- Researcher: How do you feel about your English compared with Han peers?
 S4: I think there is no need to compare me with Han students... We learn Chinese as a second language, and they learn English as a second language. You see, we can speak Putonghua much better than they speak English. While Han students have learned English since primary school, we started learning it only in senior high school. Moreover, we have more advantages than Han in learning English. We can speak native-like English. but they have difficulty with some pronunciations and speak accented English.
 (1st fieldwork)

The participant firstly analysed the reasons for his and other Uyghur students' relatively low English proficiency, and then reframed the power relations between Uyghur and Han by emphasizing their higher Chinese competency, which for them is a second language. He also sought to establish an alternative identity for Uyghur by emphasizing the particular linguistic skills in English language at which Uyghurs excelled (in this case, pronunciation in English).

Given the intragroup variations in English proficiency and the heterogeneity of their English language learning backgrounds, participants also drew on their own educational and living experiences and the resources embodied therein to counter their disadvantageous status and negotiate positive individual identities, as shown in the following excerpt:

- Researcher: It seemed that you learned English even later than your peers attending boarding school.
- S10: Yeah, but as a girl grown up in Urumchi, I have been living in a bicultural and bilingual (Uyghur and Chinese) environment, and I know that learning another language is good for us. So I am more open to a new language and culture. Many students from boarding school, though they learned more English than us, cannot really accept the culture represented by the language and are thus unable to step out of their comfort zone. Moreover, our high Chinese proficiency enables us to understand course content faster, thus saving us a lot of time to invest in learning English.
(2nd fieldwork)

Of the Uyghur students enrolled in Zhendan University, those who used to attend boarding school in Urumchi (S10 and S2) received the least amount of formal English language education prior to entering university. It seems that S10 was able to counter her unfavourable condition as an English beginner by foregrounding the positive attributes and social positions her urban identity as an “Urumchi girl” brought to her (e.g., open-mindedness, bicultural identity) and by maximizing the advantage in learning English conferred by her Chinese proficiency.

In a similar way, students educated in boarding school drew upon their favourable English-learning experiences to perform a desirable linguistic and social identity, as shown below:

- Researcher: How has your English learning been over the past year?
- S12: I passed CET-6 and got 513.
- Researcher: That is a high score. Congratulations!
- S12: Thank you! (Smiles) The reason why I can get a higher score than other Uyghur students on the exam is that I had been immersed in intensive English-learning in boarding school in Shanghai, unlike in Xinjiang, where little importance is attached to English in senior high. Teachers there do not understand the importance of English.
(2nd fieldwork)

The field notes indicate that S12 was very proud of her senior-high schooling experiences in Shanghai. By relating her English proficiency to her English language learning experiences in boarding school, S12 made a distinction between herself and those Uyghur peers who had attended high school in Xinjiang. Not only did she try to demonstrate herself as a competent English learner, she also conceived for herself a positive urban identity based on the high symbolic value that Shanghai epitomizes.

In addition to the historical English language learning and educational experiences, participants jointly negotiated a Uyghur elite identity based on the context in which they were located (i.e. Zhendan University), as is exhibited in the following extracts:

Every Zhendannese has excellent English. Uyghurs in our university have much better English than those in other universities. (Interview with S5, 2nd fieldwork)

Everyone in Zhendan University knows the paramount importance of English. If you do not learn English well, you cannot claim to be a Zhendannese. (Interview with S11, 2nd fieldwork)

In these extracts, participants established a link between the university and English competency. By identifying themselves as members of Zhendan University, participants tried to overthrow the negative positionality broadly associated with Uyghur students' low English competency. By distinguishing themselves from their Uyghur counterparts attending less prestigious institutions (based on their assumption on the latter's poor English proficiency), they negotiated a more prestigious Zhendan Uyghur identity; the way in which they used that identity to resist a less desirable positioning in relation to English proficiency was also reflected in interviews with and observations of other participants.

Development of English performative competence using heritage resources

The data show that this group of educated elite minority students was able to capitalize upon their heritage resources to scaffold their English language learning and to facilitate their communication by using English as a lingua franca. The heritage resource repertoire encompasses the Uyghur language and the students' ethnic social network, as demonstrated below:

- Researcher: How was your English learning over the past year?
 S5: In fact, I seldom sat down to learn English on purpose. The only thing that is worth mentioning is that I registered in an online English course distributed by a language training centre called Atlan. I appreciate their courses because they use Uyghur as the instructional language. Atlan is a very famous private agency in Urumchi and all of its teachers are Uyghur. It can improve your English in a short period of time and ensure that you can pass TOFEL or IELTS.
 (2nd fieldwork)

During the two periods of fieldwork, all participants expressed that Uyghur is close to English, both are alphabetic and phonetic languages. In order to improve his English proficiency, S5 actively explored Uyghur-related English learning courses and exploited social and online resources, such as the Uyghur-operated Atlan training agency. In addition, by positively commenting on the agency, he added symbolic value to his native language, thereby allowing him to negotiate a powerful heritage identity. Other participants recalled how their native language helped them to communicate by using English as a lingua franca, as demonstrated below:

- Researcher: Do you chat with international students when you serve as a part-time cashier in our school's supermarket?
 S5: Not too often. But sometimes we have short conversations when there are not so many consumers. Last time, a German student asked me how to operate a flashlight and how to charge it. I told him that the flashlight used batteries and showed him how to use it.
 Researcher: So you could communicate with him very well.
 S3: Yeah, other part-time student cashiers were also surprised at my oral English. They knew that I was always poor at exams.
 Researcher: How were you able to speak fluent English?
 S3: Many of the words in English are similar to or almost the same as those in Uyghur; for example, the word *battery*. I consciously turn to my mother tongue when speaking [English].
 (2nd fieldwork)

From the conversation we may see that S3 was skilful at drawing upon his native language to ensure smooth interaction in English. His successful performance of communicative ability seemed to reshape his image in his peer's eyes and allowed him to display an identity as a good English user. Another participant (S1) also said, about his interaction with a Turkish classmate, that while they mainly used English, he sometimes resorted to using Uyghur, which bears a similarity to Turkish, when he had difficulty communicating in English.

Whilst participants were able to draw upon heritage capital to improve their English performative competence, it was found that few were able to appropriate community and local linguistic resources efficiently. An exception was S10, who had learned very little English in senior high school. She not only attended a Uyghur language training agency during her holidays, but also enrolled in English-medium courses at Zhendan University and bought English-language novels. Her active exploitation and utilization of both heritage and local resources resulted in dramatic progress in learning English.

Learning English from and for practice and performing a metropolitan identity

The interview and observation data revealed that although Uyghur students on the whole regarded the College English course as “unhelpful” and the textbook “too difficult”, they were good at learning English in practice, adopting a set of learning strategies, and utilizing diverse linguistic and multimodal resources. When asked about his English language learning, S2 became embarrassed:

S2: To be honest, I really feel regret [because] I spent limited time in learning English. But I do have many contacts with English every day. For example, I have to read a lot of literature on my major; I often read information on Wikipedia; I like watching American TV. It seems that I learn English very passively.
(2nd fieldwork)

The data show that S2 used English in various ways in his academic practice and personal life, which may have helped him to improve his performative competence. However, entrenched by normal and traditional concepts of learning, he seemed unsure about his way of learning English, which he described as passive.

Unlike S2, other participants were positive and enthusiastic about enhancing their English proficiency in out-of-classroom context:

S8: I find that what is taught in the English textbook can hardly be used in real communication and does not tell you in what context you can use it. I prefer learning English by watching American movies, through which I learn how to use English in a proper context...
(2nd fieldwork)

S8 compared learning English through textbooks and through watching English-language shows and movies, and argued that the latter way provided more opportunities for contextualized learning than learning in traditional classes.

All participants acknowledged that their experiences in Shanghai, an international city, and their socialization at the university helped them to move beyond the examinations purpose for learning English and develop awareness of the communication purpose. Summarizing participants' views on the function of English and their learning shows that they oriented their learning activities to their own

interests, specifically, wider exposure to knowledge, professional development and exploration of the broader world:

S5: I do not learn English to communicate with international students or other foreigners. I learn English because I want to keep myself updated with high-tech, like computer science. For example, I watch TED frequently not because I want to learn English but because they spread cutting-edge ideas. Also, I often read news and fictions in English for my interest... English is like a weapon and a key that is able to help you achieve your purpose once you master it.
(2nd fieldwork)

S5 adopted a performativity view of English (Pennycook, 2004), which neither sees the language from the lens of linguistic imperialism nor associates it with native speakers, but views English as a resource allowing the individual learner to perform their identities according to the situated context and needs. In the local context, where “opportunities to communicate with international students were rare, as they tended to stick within their group” (S5), the participant appropriated English as an important tool for gaining knowledge and information, as is shown in the “weapon” metaphor he used.

The data also show that, by navigating English as a matter of practicality and in association with their interests, participants were able to contest the essentialist understanding of them as Uyghur and display a metropolitan identity, as is exhibited in two Wechat screenshots from S10 (Figure 1). According to S10, the first poster (left-hand side) described her feelings during the first few semesters at Zhendan University. We may see that the participant was minoritised and was associated with some assumed characteristics, but contested them and tried to reposition herself. The second comment and picture (right-hand side) described S10’s trip to Beijing and the picture posted is of an English language novel she bought in Beijing. Based on her own accounts and the author’s observations of her in the library and on Wechat, S10 had developed a deep interest in English reading. By showing her interest and proficiency in English in a digital space, and expressing her love of Beijing, the participant disassociated herself from fixed attributes or a certain territory, and thus performed a metropolitan identity.

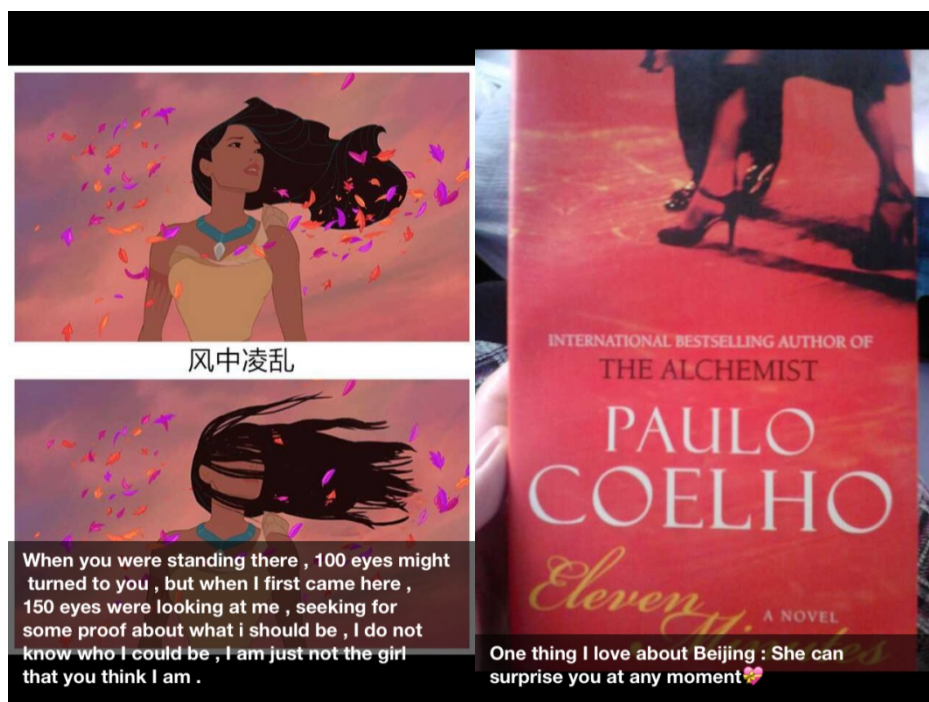


Figure 1. Screenshot of P10’s Wechat posters on March 3, 2015

Discussion and conclusion

This paper discusses the questions: “How do Uyghur students develop their performative competence, and negotiate and perform their identities, in the process of learning and using the English language in the host context?” Echoing Canagarajah’s (2013b) study on skilful migrant language learners, the findings in the present study show that elite Uyghur participants were able to contest their disadvantageous position and negotiate positive identities by mobilizing various timelines and by referring to both local and translocal contexts. Consistent with Kramsch and Whiteside (2008), they not only situated themselves in historical language learning contexts, but also in the local language learning community. By referencing the English language education policies of and limited language resources available in Xinjiang to account for their relatively low English proficiency, the participants critically deconstructed the image of Uyghur as poor English learners. Furthermore, by drawing on their high proficiency in Chinese as a second language and their particular English skills (e.g., better pronunciation) and English learning advantages (e.g., its similarity to Uyghur), participants reframed the power relations between Uyghur and Han students and constructed a positive identity for Uyghur students.

Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) argued that individuals’ performative ability lies in their ability to “play a game of distinction on the margins of established patrimonies” (p. 664). In alignment with the findings in previous studies on minorities who share a common ethnic background but have diverse linguistic and migratory experiences (e.g., Canagarajah, 2013a; Creese & Blackledge, 2015; Gu, forthcoming; Li, 2014), participants in the current study negotiated their identities by drawing constant distinctions between themselves and intragroup members who had different language educational backgrounds (e.g., bilingual class versus boarding school students) or who studied in less prestigious institutions than Zhendan University. Given that the participants associated attending Zhendan University with having good English language skills, they sought to build an identity of qualified Zhendannese by differentiating themselves, not only from their less advantaged peers at the university, but also by distinguishing their ideology from those practiced by Uyghur counterparts at other universities.

Pennycook (2003) argued that “[i]t is not that people use language varieties because of who they are, but rather that we perform who we are by (amongst other things) using varieties of language” (p. 528); we should therefore be cautious of viewing English in terms of linguistic hegemony, but view it as a local and situated performance operated with local languages and identity resistance (Pennycook, 2004). As Canagarajah (2013b) argued, good English performers are open to diversity and learn English from practice, whereby they consider the language learning and using opportunities as shared by all, and language use and learning are not separate processes. Though positioned as marginalized English language learners, the group of minority elites in the host community were well aware of the repertoire of resources they brought with them and were able to consciously appropriate them to contest their underprivileged status in English-learning, and to construct desirable identities. Moreover, participants developed their learning strategies by practicing them in their daily life, and by integrating them with their interests. Rather than confining themselves within their own culture, the ethnic elite students cultivated their taste for different cultures; in so doing, they performed both a privileged institutional identity and a metropolitan youth identity. However, unlike previous studies conducted in Western contexts in which English is the dominant language and used daily (e.g., Canagarajah, 2013a; Li, 2014), chances for the participants in the present study to use English for immediate communication (e.g., with

native English speakers) are limited. The absence of power relations constituted by the dichotomy of nativeness versus non-nativeness in the current context may explain in part why little resistance against the English language arose among participants.

Despite their abilities to contest unfavourable positions and negotiate positive memberships by improving their English performance, participants nonetheless faced several challenges. Due to their relatively low English proficiency, it was difficult for them to fully utilize community resources, which mainly catered to the Han majority. Moreover, participants were under tremendous pressure to study in their major courses so as not to fall behind their Han counterparts, and thus had limited time for learning English. Hence, host institutions are urged to adapt their language learning policies and practices to accommodate minority students, while students themselves are advised to exploit local linguistic resources, in addition to heritage resources. Maybe most importantly, policy-makers are advised to implement a proper trilingual policy (heritage language, Chinese and English) in minority regions. However, it should be noted that this study focused only on a group of minority students at a key university in an economically advanced city; the ethnic minority students who study in culturally and economically different regions may be acting differently and more future research could be conducted among them. This study identifies certain areas worthy of further exploration, including digital space, which has proved to be an interesting site for exercising agency and performing one's identity.

Notes

1. The program, Improving Higher Education Among Minorities in Xinjiang by Enrolling Them in Tertiary Institutions Located in Mid-eastern Cities, started in 1990 and is designed to educate minorities from Xinjiang in institutions located in mid-eastern cities.
2. College English is a course for non-English-major undergraduates among tertiary institutions in China, which usually lasts for two school years.

About the authors

Xiaoyan (Grace) Guo is a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education, Chinese University of Hong Kong. Her research interests include identity and multilingual practice, language and neoliberalism, critical theory and discourse analysis.

Michelle Gu is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Education at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Her research interests include teacher professional development, language and identity, language and ideology, discourse theory and analysis, second language learning motivation, communities of practise in language education, linguistic ecology and teacher education. She has published widely in international referred journals.

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Appendix: Interview protocol

1. The participants' experiences of English language learning and use both in and out of classroom
 - a) How has your English language learning been going on over the semester? Could you please share with me your impressive experiences?
 - b) What measures do you take to learn English? What are the effective ones? In what way do they work for you?
 - c) What are the available resources for you to learn English? How do you use them for learning English?
 - d) What are the major challenges you have encountered in learning English?
 - e) Have you encountered any occasions when you can use English out of the classroom? If so, could you please tell me your experiences?
2. The participants' opinions and feelings towards English language learning and use
 - a) Are you interested in (learning) English? Why or why not?
 - b) How do you feel about your English proficiency comparing with Han peers (other Uyghur students)?
 - c) What do you think are your advantages (disadvantages) over Han students in learning English?
3. The participants' views towards the role of the English language
 - a) How do you comment on English as an international language?
 - b) How do you think of the importance of English for you in the university and in Shanghai?
 - c) How do you think of the role of English compared with Chinese?
4. The participants' perceived influences from their English language learning and use experiences
 - a) Have you gained (lost) any opportunities thanks to your English proficiency?
 - b) What role does English function in your academic study (daily life)?
 - c) In what way does your English proficiency shape your plan for future?