Nativespeakerism in Target-Culture Expectation: Chinese Perception of Native and L2 Idiom Usage

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Abstract

Questioning the use of monolingual native speaker's idealized competence as the benchmark for defining and assessing L2 teaching and learning, this empirical study investigates whether nativeness of the speaker impacts native Chinese speakers' perception of idiom usage. Utilizing the Matched Guise Technique and cognitive interview, this study examines 20 native Chinese subjects' perceptions of 18 matched sets of audio recordings of Chinese idioms usage in various social situations produced by one native speaker and two L2 learners of Chinese. The findings reveal that Chinese subjects had different expectations for members of their own native culture, and L2 learners, the cultural outsiders, as manifested in the unequal reactions towards native and non-native executions of the same linguistic move. Discussion of native speakers' ideologies, expectations, and cognitive processes

behind these results contributes to foreign language pedagogy

in preparing L2 learners for successful negotiation of

intentions with target culture in the real world.

Keywords: Nativespeakerism; Target-culture expectations; Chinese idioms; native speaker/L2 learner stereotyping; Speech perception

Introduction

In the realm of foreign language education, there has been an alarming tendency that treats native speakers and second language (L2) speakers as homogeneous groups. This is manifested in the ideology and pedagogical practices that holds *native-speakerism* as the default for the language learning and teaching. The notion of native-speakerim was first defined by Holliday (2005, p. 6) as 'an established belief that "native-speaker" teachers represent a "Western culture" from which spring the ideals both of the language and of English language teaching methodology.' Houghton and River (2013) further expanded the concept to non-English and non-Western contexts as an ideology which imposes native speaker (NS) idealization on, and thus criminates against, the so-called non-native speakers (NNS). As pointed out by Gill (2012), "the figure of the native speaker has long been instrumental in defining the apparently common-sense linguistic boundaries of authentic belonging, in relation to which the non-native speaker has been positioned" (p.273).

In the past several decades the rationale behind native-speakerism has been questioned, and researchers have looked into how such an ideology is manifested on the empirical level. In foreign language education, the debate centers around the authenticity and legitimacy associated with native-speakership. Specifically, scholars have challenged the use of monolingual native speakers' idealized competence as the benchmark for defining and assessing L2 teaching and learning (e.g., Firth & Wagner, 1997; Hall, Cheng, & Carlson, 2006; Larsen–Freeman, 2014; The Douglas Fir Group, 2016; Ortega, 2013; Zuengler & Miller, 2006). Kramsch (1993) broke new grounds by adopting the concept of a third space to question the traditional native speaker (NS)/non-native speaker (NNS) dichotomy in foreign language learning. Yet despite such efforts, in the majority of foreign language classrooms the "authentic and ideal" notion of "native speaker" continues to hold sway, affecting crucial hiring decisions and pedagogical practices. In the meanwhile, most of the studies challenging the native-speakerist ideology have

focused on English language teaching (ELT), revealing a gap in empirical examination of native-speakerism in the context of an L2 other than English (Llurda and Calvet-Terre, 2022)

Expanding the scope of discussion to non-English languages, this empirical study compares native Chinese speakers' perception of NS and L2 use of Chinese idioms, and the underlying psychological and cognitive processes of how speech-linked stereotypes and judgements about the speakers are reached. The findings offer empirical support that challenges native-speakerism in foreign language education and suggest a Third-Space view for language instruction.

Review of Literature

Role of Target Culture Expectation in Receptivity of Foreign Language Learners

Expectation is a powerful element in human communication, and perhaps even more so in cross-cultural contexts. Gumperz (quoted in Young, 1994) made the observation

about cross-cultural interactions that one cannot assume communication between a competent foreigner and a native is the same as that between two native speakers. Agar (1994) asserts that the nature of the interactions non-native speakers face is fundamentally different from those of natives since they are consciously or subconsciously treated differently in target-culture (C2) environments.

One rationale behind this widely observed phenomenon is the "native speaker effect" (Zhang, 2016), particularly how the mentality of the native speaker as the self-perceived "rightful owner" of their language influences their perception and evaluation of the non-native learners' language usage. Regardless of whether this "ownership" is real or simply imagined, it has actual, concrete influences on people's practice and perception. The asymmetrical power relation between native and non-native speakers has been captured in various manifestations, including testimonies of L2 learners themselves describing the pleasure derived from successfully "passing for a native," as well as the frustrating

Schadenfreude of native speakers who are "eager to detect the slightest trace of a [foreign] accent, real or imagined" (Kramsch, 2009a, p. 93). The native speakers' stereotypical expectation that L2 speakers will exhibit linguistic incompetence and demonstrate L2 interference on the target language derives from the native-speakerist ideology that places native and non-native speakers at two ends of the dichotomy.

Pedagogues also recognize cross-cultural expectations as a crucial factor in foreign language education. Walker and Noda (2010) assert the importance of assessing foreign language learners' performance against the expectations of the target culture:

> We can't be content to observe the understanding and performance of our learners, even if they seem to reflect the assumptions of the target culture. We must also evaluate the receptivity of their performance in the target culture. It should not be enough that they have conveyed their intentions or comprehend

another person's intentions successfully. We need to be concerned with how the persons with whom they interact view the success of the communication. Only when our students are made aware of the reactions of their interlocutors in the classroom and beyond will their memory of the future serve them well. (pp. 47-48)

Matched Guise Technique to Measure Unconscious Stereotyping

Studies along the lines of linguistic stereotyping (LS) and reverse linguistic stereotyping (RLS) have suggested that unconscious stereotyping, in particular, native-speakerist perception and expectation associating L2 linguistic features with negative attributes, is a prominent issue associated with assessment of language proficiency and social judgment in intercultural contexts. Linguistic stereotyping (LS) and reverse linguistic stereotyping (RLS) are the two hypotheses for understanding how a listener activates stereotypes about the

social groups they believe the speaker belongs to. The LS hypothesis posits that listeners make stereotypical assumptions and judgment about the speakers based on the speakers' linguistic variations (see Bradac et al. 2001 for a detailed review). Studies have indicated that non-standard linguistic features associated with lower-prestige groups have a negative impact on listener judgment of the speaker (Rubin 1992; Lev-Ari and Keysar 2010). For example, when listeners hear a non-standard grammatical feature or a foreign accent, they give the speaker lower ratings in terms of their competence or social attractiveness. The RLS hypothesis (Rubing, 1992; Kang & Rubin 2009) is a later development which argues that stereotypes are not necessarily activated by the patterned speech variations perceived but can be activated just by listeners' beliefs and expectations of what they are going to hear. In Gilchrist and Chevrot's (2017) study on the influence of ethnicity on foreign language proficiency perception, the researchers compared judgment of the Syrian stimuli by French students who were explicitly told the

speaker is an Arabic speaker and those who were not informed of the origin of the speaker. The findings showed that the Syrian speaker's French proficiency was more negatively evaluated by those who were explicitly told that the speaker is "Arabic".

Matched Guise Technique, based on the classic test by Lambert et al (1960), has been widely used as a standard research methodology to explore such unconscious and automatic bias involved in speech perception. Although the technique has been refined and adapted to fulfill a range of research agendas and situations, in linguistic stereotyping studies it involves two basic steps: 1) asking a speaker to perform two or more stimuli with different linguistic variations, including the so-called standard and non-standard variants, and 2) having subjects listen to the recorded stimuli and evaluate the speakers on a set of qualities, such as how friendly, intelligent, or trustworthy they sound, depending on the particular focus of the study. Having the same speaker

perform the recordings guarantees that the paralinguistic properties of the speech, such as pitch, speech rate, and other voice features are consistent to the maximum degree. Therefore, it is possible to assume that if the subjects give different evaluations, it is based on the specific standard and non-standard linguistic variables being used.

In this study, two dimensions of linguistic variation were designed to examine the NS attitudes towards unconscious and automatic stereotyping in the evaluation on NS and L2 *chengyu* usage. The first is at the grammatical and pragmatic level with variants of ordinary use (standard), no use (non-standard) and extra-ordinary use (non-standard) of *chengyu*. The second dimension compares the phonetically based NS (standard) and L2 learner (non-standard) variants such as accent and intonation. The paper focuses on the second dimension and is guided by the following research question:

RQ: Do native Chinese subjects have different speech-linked expectations regarding *chengyu* usage by NS and L2 learners of Chinese? If so, how does it influence the subjects' evaluation of the speakers' Chinese language proficiency and social attractiveness?

Methods

Subjects

Subjects recruited in this study are native Chinese speakers who are employees in several Chinese organizations in Shanghai and Beijing, including local branches of international corporations, foreign-Chinese joint ventures, state-owned businesses, elite Chinese universities, and language training institutes. Subject recruitment was conducted using the "friend of a friend" method (Milroy, 1987), a social network method through which the investigator identified and recruited the subjects using intermediary networks rather than personal ones. Before

traveling to the two cities, the investigator made contacts with local friends or sometimes "friends of a friend" who personally know the candidates and introduced the investigator to these subjects. Twenty subjects were recruited in total, including ten from each city. Out of the twenty subjects, six are males and fourteen are females. In terms of age, three subjects are in their early 40s and the rest are between 25 and 40.

Each subject either supervises or works as the colleague of non-native Chinese speakers in a Chinese working or educational environment. Two reasons underlie the selection of this specific group of subjects. One reason is that Chinese supervisors and colleagues are in direct contact with non-native Chinese employees on a daily basis. Non-native learners of Chinese who intend to succeed in communicating in the target culture need to convey such intentions in ways that can be recognized by their Chinese counterparts. With sufficient exposure to and established networks with non-native Chinese speakers at the workplace

in Chinese environments, this subject pool represents a group of Chinese professionals who serve as the most valid evaluators of the non-native Chinese learners' linguistic, professional, and interpersonal performances in Chinese working environments. The second reason is that the subjects' occupations demand a college degree at the minimum and many of the subjects hold an M.A. or Ph.D. degree in their respective fields. The higher educational background, together with other qualifying experiences, justifies them as capable of making meaningful judgment about native and non-native Chinese speakers' *chengyu* usage in a variety of contexts from the extremely formal to the most casual ones.

Procedures

Creation of Stimuli

One native Chinese speaker (male) and two L2 Chinese speakers (male and female) were recruited to produce audio stimuli that, during the experiment stage, were played to elicit

listener responses. Both of the two non-native speakers, Bob

and Rose, have been learning Chinese for over 10 years and

have reached Advanced High in the OPI test. Born and raised

in mainland China, the recruited native Chinese speaker Liao

is a CFL instructor who speaks standard Mandarin without

any detectable regional accent. For stimuli that are

conversational exchanges, the investigator, a native Chinese

speaker who also speaks standard Mandarin without a

noticeable accent, recorded the role of the Chinese

interlocutor.

Each speaker was asked to enact the Chinese scripts

involving *chengyu* usage. Each speaker recorded four sets of

stimuli consisting of social contexts (see Table 2) ranging

from the most formal (public speech and discourse) to less

formal (spontaneous conversations in professional settings).

The four sets of stimuli containing variations of *chengyu* usage

in formal contexts include (1) an opening remark at the 100th

anniversary of the founding of a university, (2) a question

asked by a journalist at a press conference, (3) a response

given at a press conference by a Chinese spokesperson, and

(4) a live commentary on a newly released film during a TV

talk show. The rationale for focusing on the formal occasions

is *chengyu*'s significant association with written genres. In

Chinese tradition, a public speech normally follows a

prepared written script, which renders the use of *chengyu* in

this setting the closest to those in written texts. Conversation

in a professional setting, such as a Q&A during a press

conference, allows for more colloquial expressions yet still

requires a certain level of formality in terms of discourse.

For each set of audio stimuli of the same message,

three variations were created, as shown in Table 1. One

stimulus contains the "ordinary use" of *chengyu* (ordinary

defined in terms of both accuracy and the quantity of *chengyu*

tokens) in a specific context. In the other two stimuli, the use

of *chengyu* were replaced, respectively, with "no use" (non-

literary language expressing the same meaning in the same

context" and "extra-ordinary use" of *chengyu* (in terms of

semantic accuracy, grammatical accuracy, and the number of

chengyu tokens). All the "ordinary" variations were adapted from authentic Chinese discourse, based on which the "extra-ordinary use" and "no use" variations were created by the researcher. Stimuli have been tested in a pilot study for authenticity based on native speakers' judgment of the appropriateness of the *chengyu* usage under given contexts.

Table 1 Example of Chengyu Usage Variations

Ordinary Use	虽然中国外交部<u>一再否认</u>，但类似事件还是<u>层出不穷</u>，您能否确认此事的真实性？ *Although China's foreign ministry <u>repeatedly denied it</u>, articles covering similar topics still <u>appear in print one after another</u>. Can you confirm this matter?*
Extra-ordinary Use	*虽然中国外交部一再<u>矢口否认</u>，但类似事件还是<u>屡见不鲜</u>，您能否确认此事的真实性？ *Although China's foreign ministry <u>flatly denied it</u>, articles covering similar topics <u>have lost their novelty as they appear in print again and again</u>. Can you confirm this matter?*
No Use	虽然中国外交部<u>一次又一次地否认</u>，但类似事件还是<u>一次又一次地出现</u>，您能否确认此事的真实性？ *Although China's foreign ministry <u>denied it again and again</u>, articles covering similar topics still <u>appear in print again and again</u>. Can you confirm this matter?*

Efforts have been made to include four types of "extra-ordinary" usage, which are reflective of common mistakes, or marginalized usage of *chengyu* that are commonly negatively interpreted. These include (a) improper use of new

Internet idioms[3] in formal discourse; (b) overuse, the compiling of more than two *chengyu* items in one sentence or a short speech; (c) semantic misuse, which refers to the violation of the conventionalized indexical relationship of a *chengyu* item's semantic properties and a given semantic context; and (d) grammatical misuse. See Appendix A for examples.

Table 2 Naming Convention of the Audio Stimuli

i. Name of the speaker	
L	Liao
B	Bob
R	Rose
ii. Social contexts	

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[3] Being forged and trending in the Internet since 2010, these internet memes have become popular among Chinese youth with their "ironic, contemporary and sometimes political themes" (Qin, 2013). These new Internet idioms retain the four-character format of the classic *chengyu*, and are usually created by contracting several expressions, or a longer sentence into a Chinese-style acronym.

1	Formal public speech (opening remark for the 100th funding anniversary of university)
2	Formal conversation (journalist inquiry at a press conference)
3	Formal conversation (government official response at a press conference)
4	Formal conversation (recommendation of new film release in radio talk show)

iii. *Chengyu* usage variations

a	Ordinary Use
b	No Use
c	Extra-ordinary Use

Collecting Subject Reactions

Subjects' responses were collected during one-on-one interview sessions, first in the format of a semi-controlled interview, followed by a survey. During both procedures, cognitive interviewing grounded in the interpretivist framework was utilized to explore how and why the respondents reached those conclusions. Cognitive interview methodology is a qualitative approach that examines the cognitive processes used by respondents as they form answers to survey questions. The underlying assumption is that the respondents' cognitive responses drive the survey responses, and an understanding of cognition is central to understanding the question responses and to justify the validity of the questions (Willis, 2005; Miller, 2014). A commonly cited question-response model contains four steps: 1) comprehending the question; 2) recalling or retrieving relevant information; 3) processing the information to formulate an answer, and 4) mapping that answer onto the

provided response categories (Miller, 2014; also see Willis, 2005 for a detailed discussion).

Semi-controlled interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data on subject reactions to the speakers and subject beliefs about the use of *chengyu* in the given stimuli. The goals for the interviews are: (a) to determine the general reactions to the speakers, (b) to collect terms used spontaneously by subjects to describe the speakers, and (c) to determine the intuition and ideologies regarding the use of *chengyu* and its effect on the evaluation of the speakers' social identity and personal characteristics.

At the beginning of the interview session, the subjects were shown a photo of the individual whose voice they were going to hear, with a verbal cue: "This is Xiao Liao/Bob/Rose. She/he is currently working in Beijing/Shanghai. Now you are going to listen to what she/he said." The photo showed the racioethnic information of the speakers, but the subjects weren't explicitly informed of the speakers' linguistic background. Then, they randomly

listened to one recording from each of the four sets of stimuli in a random order. Efforts were made to ensure that the stimuli assigned to each subject covered ordinary use, no use, and extra-ordinary use of *chengyu*. Each subject was also assigned to stimuli produced by both the native Chinese speaker Liao and one of the L2 speakers. After listening to each stimulus, subjects were asked to describe the context to check their understanding of the recorded stimuli, specifically the type and formality of each context. Upon hearing each stimulus, all the subjects were able to pinpoint the contexts, or at least come up with a context of similar type and formality.

Without being directed to the *chengyu* usage in each stimulus, subjects were then asked to give as detailed a description of the speaker as possible based on the recordings and to explain how they perceived and evaluated the identity and personal characteristics of the speaker. This was to investigate whether the subjects were able to establish a link between the use of *chengyu* and their perception of the

speaker's identity and personal traits. *Process-oriented probes* such as 你为什么会有这样的印象? [how do you get this impression?], 为什么这么觉得? [why do you feel this way?], and 你是根据什么作出判断的? [on what criteria did you base your judgment?] were employed to elicit the process by which the respondent calculated his or her answer, decided between alternative answer categories, or made a judgment about the answer.

A survey was conducted following the interview session where subjects were asked to listen to the same set of stimuli in the same order again and to rate the speaker in terms of a set of personal traits on a scale of 0 to 4, 0 being the lowest and 4 being the highest. The set of personal traits is illustrated in Table 3. After rating each stimulus, the subjects were asked to describe how and why they answered the question the way they did. During this process, in addition to *process-oriented probes*, I also employed *meaning-oriented probes* that centered on respondents' independent interpretation of the terms used to describe the personal traits, such as 受教育

水平[education level], 可信度 [trustworthiness], and 好感度 [likability], as well as the rating scale (0 to 4). The underlying rationale for using *meaning-oriented probes* was to elicit rich, thickly detailed accounts of subjects' interpretations of these terms via narratives. As Geertz (1973) argues, meanings are multilayered, and simply describing the surface of an interaction cannot fully extract the "true" meaning of the situation. At the methodological level, both process-oriented and meaning-oriented probes were adopted to elicit a more comprehensive and accurate account of the underlying meaning of the question-response process.

Table 3 Personal Traits Rated in the Survey

Native Speaker	L2 Speaker
Education level 受教育水平	Education level 受教育水平

Appropriateness 适当得体性	Appropriateness 适当得体性
Linguistic ability to convey ideas 语言表达能力	Linguistic ability to convey ideas 语言表达能力
Trustworthiness/Pervasiveness 可信度/说服力	Trustworthiness/Pervasiveness 可信度/说服力
Likability	Likability

好感度	好感度
	Chinese language capacity 中文水平
	Knowledge about Chinese culture 对中国文化熟知度

The survey instrument utilized, as shown in Appendix B, was designed based on a previous pilot study. Slight adjustment was made to the choice of wording to improve the fit of the survey questions to the specific population in this study.

Qualitative Analyses

Subject commentaries collected during the interview were analyzed using the grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Instead of testing a pre-existing hypothesis using a deductive approach, a grounded theory approach relies on inductive reasoning and reflective iteration. The incremental steps of the analytic process—transcribing, synthesizing interview data, comparing across subjects to identify a pattern, making conclusions—occurred simultaneously. The investigator continuously moved back and forth between interview data, patterns, and emerging conceptual claims.

Specifically, the analytic process contained five individual steps. (1) First, narratives were collected from subjects during the semi-controlled interview session that reveal how they react to each *chengyu* usage; during this process, approximately 20 hours of interview were transcribed for the next step. (2) Second, interview data were synthesized into brief summaries detailing how each subject

perceived and evaluated situated *chengyu* usage and how each formulated their answers. (3) Third, summaries were compared across subjects to identify patterns in subjects' responses towards *chengyu* usage variants in each context. (4) Fourth, the identified patterns across the native and non-native data sets were compared. (5) Fifth, comparisons were drawn with the patterns revealed by the quantitative data.

Quantitative Analyses

Quantitative data collected in this study include the numeric ratings collected through the survey questionnaires. Subjects' ratings of a set of speakers' characteristic attributes were grouped into: (1) ordinary use, (2) extra-ordinary use, and (3) no use, which were further divided into NS and L2 data sets. The factors that affect subjects' perception explored across these subsets of data are: (a) speakers' nativeness (NS-L2), and (b) the *chengyu* usage variants (ordinary, extra-ordinary use, or no use).

In this paper, descriptive statistics of survey rating were presented to examine patterns that emerged from each subset and across different subsets of rating data. Patterns discovered in the rating data were then compared with the subjects' narratives collected during the interview.

Results

In response to the research question, to determine whether native Chinese subjects have different expectations regarding *chengyu* usage by NS and L2 learners of Chinese and its potential influence of speech perception, we compared subject rating and commentaries towards NS and L2 stimuli in terms of ordinary use, no use, and extra-ordinary use. Table 4 displays the mean ratings of NS and NNS usage in terms of the seven attributes.

Table 4 Ratings of Native Speakers' and L2 Learners' Chengyu Usage in Formal Settings

	Ordinary Use		No Use		Extra-ordinary Use	
	NS	L2-L	NS	L2-L	NS	L2-L
Education level	3	3.1	2.3	3	2.9	3.1
Appropriateness	3.3	3	2.3	2.8	2.3	2.5
Linguistic skills to convey ideas	3.2	2.9	2.3	2.5	2.8	2.6
Trustworthiness & Persuasiveness	3	3	2.3	2.75	2.9	2.2
Likability	2.7	2.9	2.2	2.5	1.9	2.7
Chinese Proficiency		3		2.63		2.58

Cultural Knowledge about China		3		2.5		2.7
0=Extremely Low Rating; 1=Relatively Low Rating; 2=Average Rating; 3=Relatively High Rating; 4=Extremely High Rating						

Ordinary Use by NS vs. L2 learner

Survey data show predominantly favorable ratings of the "ordinary use" of *chengyu* by both NS and L2 learners, NS speech was rated more positively than L2 speech in terms of appropriateness and their linguistic skills to convey ideas, whereas the L2 speaker was scored slightly higher in terms of their perceived education level and general likability.

Interestingly, during the interview subjects in this study did not give excessively positive evaluations to ordinary *chengyu* usage by NS. The majority of native Chinese subjects

described the word choice in the recordings as "normal", "appropriate", "suitable way of speaking in such contexts", and even "nothing special", "not very impressive". One subject, Su, upon hearing the NS ordinary use of *chengyu* in a radio/TV talk show, commented that "I think this is just an error-free, regular conversation between native Chinese. Nothing sounded special to me." Another subject, Wu, also found the same recording to be conforming to the average Chinese standard. She said, "as a (native speaker of) Chinese, you don't have to have a higher education degree to be able to speak Chinese like this." The standard use of such conventional expressions was less perceivable by the subjects.

In contrast, subjects who heard the L2 speech stimuli positively described the speaker as "well-educated", "knowledgeable about Chinese language", "very appropriate in terms of language choice in formal situations/able to tailor one's language to the formal situation", and "with the perfect choice of words." Many of the subjects explicitly commented on the L2 learner's use of *chengyu* without being prompted to.

For example, upon hearing the L2 learner using *chengyu* in a public speech at the school anniversary, the first thing subject Su commented on was the learner's impressive use of a few *chengyu* items, which to her is an indicator of this "foreigner's" familiarity with Chinese language and culture, especially given the required level of formality of the context. L2 learners' mastery of formal register via the use of *chengyu* also contribute to a perception of an apt professional figure. As commented by a participant Cui, the non-native L2 learner displays good command of Chinese by "add[ing] rhetoric to his speech using '*yi zai fou ren* 一再否认 ' and '*ceng chu bu qiong* 层出不穷 '", which makes him sound "very official" and fit the role of a very capable diplomatic correspondent (Cui, comment on B2a).

No Use by NS vs. L2 learner

The no-use in NS speech received a lower rating overall than no-use in the L2 stimuli, just slightly above "average rating." Among all categories, the largest discrepancy in rating was

shown in terms of educational level, appropriateness as well as trustworthiness and persuasiveness.

Subject commentaries further supported the pattern revealed in the survey data. The missing of these four-character idiomatic expressions in NS stimuli stood out to the subjects as deviating from the norm. Subjects overtly expressed their preference for use of *chengyu* over "no use" stimulus which sounded "not formal enough for the situation", "unprofessional", and "inconsistent with the formal discourse." Most of the Chinese subjects, upon hearing the speaker using the no-use variants, were able to pinpoint the *chengyu* items that they intuitively believe to be appropriate in the given contexts. For example, one subject Fu commented on the no-use variant in the journalist inquiry directed to a government official at a press conference (L2b) and said, "his language choice is not up to standard and it makes him sound unqualified for a professional political journalist. He should have used '*ceng chu bu qiong* 层出不穷 .'" Another subject, Zeng, addresses the no-use variant in a

Chinese spokesman's official response at a press conference (L3b):

> "(Laugher) A spokesman shouldn't use this type of casual, oral phrases, such as *'benlai meiyou de shir yingyao shuo you* 本来没有的事儿硬要说有 .' The level of formality in his discourse dropped and the register he adopted doesn't match the situation. Also, his use of *'zou xiang mozhang*走向魔障' lowered the formality of his speech way too much. Although there's a new trend to use plain language in speech among government officials and corporate leaders, speaking in an overly emotional manner is a taboo in diplomatic discourse. This spokesman sounded very upset, lost his cool when he blurted out casual language. He could have just said *'junzi tan dang dang*君子坦荡荡 ' and that would have been sufficient. " (Zeng, comment on L3b, no-use)

L2 learners' no-use, however, received much less
attention compared with the NS. Just as native Chinese
speakers are expected to properly employ *chengyu* in formal
discourses, the Chinese subjects intuitively accept no *chengyu*
usage as the default NNS performance in formal situations.
The subjects considered L2 learner's lack of *chengyu* usage as
"an average way of speaking in a formal situation," that is, it is
acceptable for a foreigner. It was explicitly stated by Sam
(comment on B2b) that he thinks a native Chinese speaker
would use more advanced vocabulary as opposed to the
no-use variants of *ceng chu bu qiong*层出不穷. The subjects'
lower expectation of the L2 Chinese learners' mastery of
chengyu in formal contexts reveals a persona described as
"foreigners with limited membership to other elite
communities within China" that native speakers imagined for
L2 speakers of Chinese.

Extra-ordinary Use by NS vs. L2 learners

Survey ratings of extra-ordinary use by NS and L2 learners show a mixed result. Improper use of *chengyu* by NS are scored less favorably in terms of education level, appropriateness, and likability than L2 use. NS extra-ordinary use received a rating of 2.9 in terms of educational level, 2.3 in terms of appropriateness, and a below average rating of 1.9 in terms of how likable the speaker sounded. L2 extra-ordinary use, on the other hand, were scored more positively ranging from "relatively high" to "above average": educational level (3.1), likability (2.7) and appropriateness (2.5). When asked to rate the linguistic skills of the speaker as well as how trustworthy or convincing the speakers' extra-ordinary *chengyu* usage sounded, subjects rated NS higher than LS. Notably trustworthiness of L2 extra-ordinary use received a 2.2 (compared with 3 for "ordinary use" and 2.75 for "no use"), which is the lowest rating among all L2 stimuli.

Subject commentaries provide insight into the mixed evaluation shown in the numerical ratings. The subjects clearly revealed unfavorable attitudes towards non-standard NS and NNS use in these formal contexts, but for different reasons. Extra-ordinary uses by both NS and L2 speakers caught the Chinese subjects' attention as indicated by the subjects' extensive comments (extracts shown in Appendix C). Data suggests that extra-ordinary use of the *chengyu* performed by NS are recognized as intentional, reflecting certain types of unfavorable personality. Similarly, non-standard use of *chengyu* performed by L2 learners of Chinese are ultimately attributed to L2 speakers' insufficient Chinese capacity, rather than other personality characteristics.

Instead of labeling inappropriate variants as "mistakes" due to the NS speaker's ignorance or poor command of a sophisticated language style, the subjects in this study recognize the choice of new Internet idioms and excessive *chengyu* usage, for example, as conscious, intentional NS social moves, albeit unfavorable ones. For instance, upon

hearing the speaker using the new Internet *chengyu, xi da pu ben* 喜大普奔*,* in the opening remarks for a university's 100th anniversary celebration ceremony, a subject Zeng, who is a professor at an esteemed university in Beijing, in her comments expresses her concern about the choice of utilizing Internet slang on such an official occasion. Her interpretation of the speaker's motive behind this "minor publicity accident" is to appeal to the younger audience, university students who are bored and often discontent with the notoriously routineized use of cliché language in formal speeches. Another subject, Shen, also interprets the use of the derogatory *chengyu* item *yao yan huo zhong* 妖言惑众 by a government official from the Foreign Ministry as "inappropriate yet understandable." She comments:

> "(The speaker) sounds impatient, angry and a bit contemptuous... Openly accusing the media using '*yao yan huo zhong* 妖言惑众' is improper. As a public figure, you should be careful with the language you choose... However, I can somehow understand. He

probably has been harassed by the media on this issue multiple times. Even Jiang Zemin used to openly criticize the media. It's understandable. The media can be unnecessarily aggressive and annoying." (Shen, comment on L3c)

Similarly, overuse in formal contexts is perceived somewhat negatively as "annoying", and "tediously long". Two *chengyu* items employed by the subjects well characterize their attitudes towards the speaker who overdoes it : *yao wen jiao zi* 咬文嚼字 (literally meaning "bite off language, chew words", i.e., overfastidious in wording) and *guo you bu ji* 过犹不及 (going too far is as bad as falling short). The Chinese subjects, however, also interpret this excessive *chengyu* usage as a result of the speaker's deliberate decision. They acknowledge that it is not uncommon to hear Chinese, especially old-fashioned government officials or people of higher positions, employ a series of *chengyu* items in formal discourse, although the audience's intuitive reactions towards such overuse is negative.

The only type of "inappropriate use" that qualifies as "mistakes" is the semantic misuse due to misapprehension of the idiom's meaning. Interestingly, whether the subjects immediately judge the use to be improper or not, they are reluctant to overtly label it as an "error" during the interview. Subjects' comments (See Appendix C) indicate that they are quite sensitive to the semantic misuse of "*lv jian bu xian* 屡见不鲜". Jia, for example, started her comment pointing out that this improper idiom usage caught her attention, and then further suggested more suitable alternatives in the given context. Another subject, Rui, in her comment on the same recording, hesitated to decide if the use of "*lv jian bu xian* 屡见不鲜" is inaccurate, and ended up choosing a vaguer and safer middle ground by saying "there might be a more suitable expression (in lieu of *lv jian bu xian* 屡见不鲜)."

A negative attribute of the L2 learners associated with the extra-ordinary *chengyu* usage also emerged from the subject responses. L2 extra-ordinary use, were interpreted by some subjects interpreted as failed attempts to use *chengyu*

items correctly as "showing off his Chinese skills" and "trying too hard to impress." Subject Yun, for example, gave the following commentary in response to the L2 speakers' overuse of *chengyu* when delivering a speech at the funding anniversary of a university:

> "(Laughter) Foreigners using these literary language sounds so interesting, especially when they use several in a row. It shows that he has a good enough knowledge of Chinese literature to use them accurately. But I think he is kind of showing off, trying too hard to demonstrate his Chinese skills. The reason he needs to use this many *chengyu* is that he is not confident about his command of Chinese. If this were performed by a native speaker of Chinese, I would definitely categorize it as overuse. Considering that he is a foreigner, it is probably because he hasn't reached the proficiency level to use Chinese autonomously under this (formal) situation. As a

result, he tried too hard." (Yun, comment on B1c, extra-ordinary use, public speech)

Another subject, Yao, who also perceived the extra-ordinary use of *chengyu* as "showing off," continued to state that "Chinese people normally wouldn't dislike foreigners who show off their Chinese. We would just think they are not using it in the most appropriate way at most" (Yao, comment on B2c, extra-ordinary use-professional setting). In fact, in most of the cases L2 learners' non-standard use of *chengyu* does not stop the Chinese subjects from appreciating the "foreigners" for at least making attempts to use *chengyu*. Subjects generally recognize L2 speakers' efforts to learn and employ *chengyu* in formal contexts, in spite of the mistakes they made, as "it is already very rare and not easy for a foreigner to be able to use (*chengyu*)."

Discussion

Kramsch (1998), in discussing the distinction between NS and NNS that the teaching and learning of foreign language is traditionally predicated on, points out a certain authority that

comes with the native speakership in defining the authenticity

and legitimacy of language use. This perception of "native

speaker" as "the authentic embodiment of the standard

language" (Kramsch 1998, p.16), whether real or not, is

widely observed and manifests itself in the unequal reactions

towards native and non-native executions of the same

linguistic move. A comparison is drawn here to underscore

the different evaluative practices and expectations Chinese

subjects display towards members of their own native

culture—and L2 learners, the so-called cultural outsiders.

Ordinary Chengyu Usage: Lower Expectations and Higher Tolerance on L2 learner

Patterns that emerged from the data reveal that native

Chinese have lower expectations towards non-native speakers

in regard to employing four-character Chinese idioms in

formal, professional contexts. NS subjects consider the

proper *chengyu* usage in formal occasions as the most adequate

and expected NS stimuli, while failure to employ these

idiomatic expressions properly, or failure to use them at all,

stands out to the subjects as falling short of their expectations towards NS speakers.

By contrast, the Chinese subjects consciously or subconsciously lower the standard for L2 speakers. This is both implied in Chinese subjects' acceptance of no use of *chengyu* as the most adequate performance for a foreigner, and explicitly indicated in their comments that they would adopt a higher and stricter standard when evaluating native Chinese speakers' performance. When L2 learners of Chinese exceed this lowered expectation by pulling off a *chengyu* usage in formal contexts, NS subjects are pleasantly surprised and more likely to perceive the L2 learner as a competent communicator who demonstrates a decent command of Chinese language and culture knowledge. *Chengyu* is perceived as a special marker that qualifies the L2 user to be taken seriously enough to participate in higher-level conversations in the target culture.

Extra-Ordinary Chengyu Usage: Stylistic Variation vs. Insufficient Language Capacity

One common manifestation of the NS's authority to claim or assign authenticity and legitimacy to language use (Kramsch, 1998) is the assumption that native speakers of a language are privileged to employ certain linguistic transgressions. L2 learners of the language, even those whose linguistic performance can pass as "native-like", are considered incapable of bending the shared rules of a language censored by grammar and semantics. Insofar as one is seen as a language learner, positioned and judged in relation to the NS baseline, one's linguistic transgressions "count as deviations from the shared system...not contributions to or influence on it" (Prabhu, 1995, p.288).

A similar pattern is observed in the Chinese subjects' reactions towards improper *chengyu* usage by NS and L2 learners of Chinese. NS's improper *chengyu* usage is recognized in general as stylistic variations among native Chinese speakers, which, despite the criticism over the unfavorable

stylistic effects, are still accepted as within the native speaker's side of the linguistic territory. By contrast, L2 learners' improper usage always index, and are attributed to, the non-nativeness of the speakers. The non-native speakership manifests itself as a very particular level of expected Chinese capacity and cultural knowledge between "above-the-average" and "native-like," although the majority of the Chinese subjects do not have a concrete idea about what the latter encompasses. On the one hand, being able to even allude to the *chengyu* items itself indexes a higher level of engagement with Chinese language and culture. On the other hand, the failure to employ these rhetorical elements to the NS's satisfaction reinforces the "apparently common sense linguistic boundaries" between the NS and L2 speakers (Gill, 2012).

However, the perception of improper *chengyu* usage by L2 learners as mistakes, which are "bound to happen as one learns to use another language", does not reflect negatively on the learners especially in terms of how affable they sound

to native Chinese. As evident by the data, in formal situations while a L2 speaker who misuses a *chengyu* are perceived as less appropriate, less professional, and less skillful at Chinese language, native Chinese still appreciate the good-natured intention conveyed by the efforts put in trying to appeal to the Chinese conventions. In some cases, such improper usage brings out the teacher inside of the Chinese whom they never knew existed. Instead of being fixated on the mistakes, native Chinese subjects are willing, many even feel obligated, to help their foreign colleagues out and teach them the "correct" way of using the *chengyu*.

Conclusion

Grounded in an understanding of C2 expectation as a point of departure for foreign language learners to enter and become established in the target culture community, this study provides empirical evidence that challenges the ideology of native-speakerism and its manifestation in Chinese-as-a-second-language programs or Chinese foreign

language programs. Analysis of interview and survey data reveals that Chinese subjects with experiences working with non-Chinese professionals in their workplaces have different speech-linked stereotypes regarding Chinese idiom use by NS and L2 speakers. Due to the limited scope of this study, it is difficult to determine whether the different expectations are triggered phonetically (e.g., accent, pronunciation, and other speech variations) or idiomatically (e.g., by preconceived beliefs about NS and L2 speakers), or both. However, the findings of this study introduce new evidence and potential for countering the native-speakerist ideology in Chinese contexts. On the one hand, the findings confirm manifestation of native-speakerist views in Chinese contexts as the subjects show lowered expectations towards L2 *chengyu* use in the formal contexts examined in the study. The perception of NS extra-ordinary use of *chengyu* as intentional stylistic variation and the perception of L2 speakers' the identical extra-ordinary usage as mistakes further substantiates the L2 learner stereotypes as incompetent

speakers of Chinese. On the other hand, unlike linguistic stereotyping that treats patterned linguistic variations produced by L2 speakers as stigmatized in previous studies examining L2 English, closer cross-examination of the interview and survey data shows that L2 *chengyu* usage is not always the stigmatized variety. The ordinary *chengyu* use by L2 speakers are very positively received by the Chinese subjects. L2 speakers are scored higher than NS speakers in terms of their likability and education level across the board, even when they are not using the idioms properly. Observations like these indicates that while native-speakerism hold sway in the sense that L2 speakers' linguistic performances are evaluated against certain NS idealization, in the context of this study, such NS idealization are not always imposed on the L2 speaker of Chinese in formal and professional contexts.

The findings suggest a shift of focus away from building monolingual and monoculture competence as a foreign language learning goal, a goal which is neither necessary nor attainable. Instead of achieving native-like

proficiency, L2 teaching and assessment should center around the degree of nativeness achievable by a L2 learner based on how the interlocutors whom he or she interacts with perceive the communication in the real world. Classroom instruction should provide ample opportunities for learners to form and test out hypotheses about the reactions of their interlocutors under clearly defined, authentic C2 contexts: what are the roles involved, what are their intentions and expectations, and accordingly the efficient strategies to achieve shared goals?

To foreground NS's expectations and receptivity of foreign language learners' performances as a focal point of instruction and assessment doesn't prescribe C2 expectations as preset and absolute rules. Instead, foreign language learners constantly negotiate in the Third Space (Kramsch 2009b), a place of contact between two languages or ways of being, a social and cultural reality being constructed through discourse among people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Kramsch (2009a) proposes that language learners are multilinguals who do not merely abide by the

order of the target culture; they should retain an "outsideness that enables [them] to play with various objective and subjective meanings" (p. 189). Shepherd (2005) also suggests that "the person who learns how to interact with the target culture on its terms while maintaining some semblance of his or her individual identity with a trace of 'foreign-ness', or who is able to forge an accepted identity within the new culture, seems less likely to be rejected by the group" (p. 197).

The new goal of foreign language learning proposed by this paper is a repertoire of effective and desirable Third-Space personae based on C2 expectations, which enables successful foreign language learners to effectively negotiate intentions at varied levels between C1 and C2. The unequal power relations between NS and L2 speakers at play in real world intercultural communications should be recognized, as illustrated in the case of unequal native expectations of *chengyu* usage by NS and L2 learners of Chinese. Meanwhile, learners of a foreign language need to be aware of their roles as multilingual and multicultural subjects

who have in their repertoire rich linguistic and cultural resources to take advantage of what is expected of them, to achieve their own agendas. Just as being viewed as a "native" or "foreigner" triggers stereotypical assumptions and expectations about ones' *chengyu* skills, the perceived "foreignness" also creates a Third Space in which particular rhetorical and symbolic resources become available exclusively to L2 learners. Gaining an accurate understanding of the situated C2 expectations is a crucial first step in training L2 learners for successful negotiation of intentions in the target culture.

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Appendix A: Five Categories of Extra-Ordinary Usage

Categories of Extra-ordinary Use	Examples (extracts)	Subjects' Comments (extracts)
(a) Improper use of new Internet idioms in formal discourse	**1) APP:** 今天对在场每一位都会是一个<u>永生难忘</u>的日子。 It is an <u>unforgettable</u> occasion today <u>for all our lives.</u> **2)** *今天对在场每一位都会是一个<u>喜大普奔</u>的日子 。	"Personally I don't like the use of '*xi da pu ben* 喜大普奔' very much. The old generation professors in the audience probably don't even know this word…I understand where this student is coming from. Maybe he wants to distinguish his speech from

	*It is such a <u>thrilling</u> occasion today <u>that</u> <u>every one is rejoicing</u> <u>and spreading the</u> <u>word.</u>	faculty member's style… But it's hard to imagine that a student from (elite schools such as) PKU would use this at the 100th anniversary ceremony. It would become a minor publicity incident." (Zeng, comment on L1d)
(b) Overuse	**1) APP:** 这部片子表面上看挺搞笑的，但是笑过之后背后的主题却又<u>发人深思</u>。	"He used so many four-character words, which sounded overfastidious in wording (咬文嚼字). The truth is I don't remember which ones

| | On the surface this seems to be a comedy, but after the laughter comes a <u>thought-provoking</u> theme.

2) *这部片子表面上看挺搞笑的，但是笑过之后背后的主题却又<u>发人深思、耐人寻味、意味深长</u>。

* On the surface this seems to be a comedy, but after the | he used in a sense that I stopped processing the meaning of the expressions." He sounded like a man of letter. This is appropriate for formal occasions, a bit too much, but appropriate. However, I personally prefer more simple and succinct way of expression. (Mo, comment on L1c);

"He went too far which is as bad as |

	laughter comes a <u>thought-provoking, intriguing</u> theme <u>that expresses volumes</u>.	falling short (过犹不及). (Overuse) is too annoying in formal occasions, but it would work better if you are joking with friends" (Hui, comment on L1c)
c) Semantic misuse: inaccurate word meaning	1) **APP:**虽然中国外交部一再否认，但类似报道还是<u>层出不穷</u>，您能否确认此事的真实性？ Although China's foreign ministry repeatedly denied_it, articles covering	"His use of the word '*lv jian bu xian* 屡见不鲜' stood out. It's not quite appropriate. In this context you can say 'news articles *ceng chu bu qiong* 层出不穷', or simply 'appear ceaselessly.' His use of *lv jian bu xian* seems a

	similar topics still <u>appear</u> in print <u>one after another.</u> Can you confirm the authenticity of this matter? **2)** *虽然中国外交部一再矢口否认，但类似报道还是<u>屡见不鲜</u>，您能否确认此事的真实性？ * Although China's foreign ministry flatly denied it, articles covering similar topics <u>have lost their novelty as they</u> <u>appear</u>	bit unfitting here." (Jia, comment on L2c) "The use of '*lv jian bu xian* 屡见不鲜' seems inaccurate…or maybe not. There might be a more suitable expression." (Rui, comment on L2c)

	in print <u>again and again.</u> Can you confirm the authenticity of this matter?	
(d) Grammatical misuse	1) **APP:**虽然中国外交部<u>一再否认</u>，但类似报道还是层出不穷，您能否确认此事的真实性？ Although China's foreign ministry <u>repeatedly denied it</u>, articles covering similar topics still appear in print one	

| | after another. Can you confirm the authenticity of this matter? **2)** *虽然中国外交部一再<u>矢口否认</u>, 但类似报道还是屡见不鲜， 您能否确认此事的真实性？ * Although China's foreign ministry <u>flatly denied it</u>, articles covering similar topics have lost their novelty as they appear in print again and again. Can you | |

	confirm the authenticity of this matter?	
(e) Inventive use		

Appendix B: Survey Instruments

Excerpt 1[4]
This is Bob:

You can listen to the recording as many times as you like.
Based on what you hear in the recording and your impression
of the individual, rate his performance by the following
categories on a scale of 0-4, 0 being the lowest and 4 highest.
You will be asked to justify your evaluation.

这是*Bob*的一段录音。如果需要可以反复多次重听这段录
音。根据你刚听到的，请根据你对说话者的印象，就以下
方面对他进行评分（*0－4*），并简单解释原因。

---

[4] During data collection, only the Chinese version of the survey was provided
to the participants. English translations are provided here for the readers of this
dissertation.

	0＝很低	1＝较低	2＝平均⊠平	3＝较高	4＝很高
□ 受教育⊠平 (Education level)	○	○	○	○	○
□ 适当得体性 (Appropriateness)	○	○	○	○	○
□ 语言表达能力 (Linguistic skills to convey ideas)	○	○	○	○	○
□ 可信度／说服力 (Trustworthiness/ Persuasiveness)	○	○	○	○	○
□ 好感度 (Likability)	○	○	○	○	○
*□ 中文⊠平 (Chinese proficiency)	○	○	○	○	○
*□ 对中国文化熟知度 (Knowledge about Chinese culture)	○	○	○	○	○

Excerpt 2

This is Xiao Ming：

You can listen to the recording as many times as you like.

Based on what you hear in the recording and your impression

of the individual, rate his performance by the following

categories on a scale of 0-4, 0 being the lowest and 4 highest.

You will be asked to justify your evaluation.

这是小明的一段录音。如果需要可以反复多次重听这段

录音。根据你刚听到的，请根据你对说话者的印象，就以

下方面对他进行评分（0－4），并简单解释原因。

	0=很低	1=较低	2=平均水平	3=较高	4=很高
□ 受教育水平 (Education level)	O	O	O	O	O
□ 适当得体性 (Appropriateness)	O	O	O	O	O
□ 语言表达能力 (Linguistic skills to convey ideas)	O	O	O	O	O
□ 可信度 / 说服力 (Trustworthiness/ Persuasiveness)	O	O	O	O	O
□ 好感度 (Likability)	O	O	O	O	O