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\*Corresponding author: Shun-Jen Hsiao,  
Chinese Information and Service Center,  
Seattle, WA, USA  
E-mail: [Shunjen6@gmail.com](mailto:Shunjen6@gmail.com)

Reviewing editor:  
Jamie Halsall, University of Huddersfield,  
UK

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## SOCIOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Naturalization and ESL learning: A case study of an ESL naturalization program

Shun-Jen Hsiao<sup>1\*</sup>

**Abstract:** Why do older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants want to naturalize? How do they prepare for the naturalization test in English? This qualitative research tries to answer both questions by observing classes, interviewing older adult students, volunteer teachers and analyzing documents of an ESL/naturalization program at PCCC in the Northwest. This paper focuses on the experience of both student and teacher participants. First, the author presents an overview of the naturalization program at PCCC. Secondly, the author examines their preparation for the naturalization exam in English, following the experiences of the immigrants and the reasons they want to naturalize. In the end, the author argues that student participants' decisions to learn English and naturalize are related to their identities, such as nationality, financial and family situations.

**Subjects:** Education; Language & Literature; Social Sciences

**Keywords:** naturalization; ESL; Chinese-speaking

### 1. Introduction

This study focuses on older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants' investment in ESL learning in the United States naturalization program. This study is to examine older adult Chinese immigrants' experiences in learning ESL naturalization courses, focusing on their investment, challenges and coping strategies. Older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants are one of the fastest growing populations of immigrants in the United States. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), one in five people in the United States will be 65 or older by 2030. There are increasing numbers of non-whites immigrated to the United States, particularly from Asia and Latin America (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). Today, Asians are the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States (Takaki, 1989; Zhou, 2009).

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This research focuses on the Chinese-speaking population. The author has been working with Chinese-speaking immigrants for more than 5 years. The limited English speaking/low income folks in the community have very little access to ESL/naturalization education.

Through this research, we want to empower limited English speaking/low income folks to have their voice and stories heard by the public. We want to eliminate barriers of language, so Chinese-speaking community can be part the mainstream community.

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

How do older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants experience ESL/naturalization learning in both classroom and informal community settings? The author conducted a case study on a naturalization ESL program in the United States. Specifically, the author examined the multiple identities of these individuals while learning English, as well as the challenges these learners encounter, including issues such as age, health, isolation from mainstream community, learning strategies, and racial and cultural prejudice. Based on the unique features of this population, the author demonstrates the strategies that administrators and ESL instructors can utilize to enhance the ESL learning experience for this population.

The increasing number of immigrants from China also relates to the increasing number of Chinese international students. According to the Migration Policy Institute (2016), the number of international students has increased to 975,000 in the 2014–2015 academic year in the United States, and the number one sending country is China. There were total 304,000 international students from China, consisting of 31.4% of the international students overall. Many of these students choose to stay in the U.S. to work after graduation.

According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics (2012), more than 1 in 10 employment-based Green Cards are issued to Chinese immigrants. Once the Chinese immigrants naturalize because of occupational qualification, they can bring their parents and siblings to the U.S. via family reunification (Leach, 2009; Zhou & Gatewood 2000).

Naturalized citizens can sponsor the immigration of their parents without quota restrictions, which encourage a greater number of older immigrants to the U.S. (Leach, 2009). After five years as Green Card holders, their parents are eligible to naturalize (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), 2011). Chinese immigrants show high interest in naturalization. Fifty three percent of Chinese immigrants were naturalized U.S. citizens in 2010, compared to only 43.7% of all immigrants (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2012).

## 2. Research design

This research was conducted over five months. The timeframe for data collection was approximately from 1 September 2012 to 1 February 2013. The author interviewed and observed the participants and analyzed their documents in order to explore the social and psychological factors in SLA including the multiple identities of the participants, investment in English and the naturalization content in the context of naturalization courses. The participants' difficulties in learning and improvement in any particular language skills were examined. The participants were interviewed and observed multiple times during the research period. This research is a qualitative study. "Qualitative research is interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experience" (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). Instead of numbers and charts, qualitative research focuses on interpreting participants' experiences. Qualitative research is applicable to this type of study because it can examine the participants' investment in English and the selective language skills of the participants' focuses, coping strategies and challenges.

As Merriam (2009) points out, "a case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (p. 40). This research was a case study of four older adult Chinese-speaking immigrant participants in a naturalization education program. This program was chosen because most students in the program were older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants. Although it was not an ethnographic study, an ethnographic method, including interviews, observations and document analysis was applied. Ethnographic methods enabled me to analyze the participants' interactions with other participants, family and community members in various social discourses. Readers of this study could have a deeper understanding of the participants in a naturalization program because the ethnographic methods focus on the "thick description" of their lived experiences (Merriam, 2009). There is very limited research related to the ESL learning experience of older adult Chinese immigrants, and using ethnographic methods enabled readers to better understand the whole picture of the participants' learning experiences.

### 2.1. Participants and settings

The ESL naturalization program at the Pacific Chinese Culture Center (PCCC) was chosen as the research site because most students in this program were older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants (the names of participants and the community setting are pseudonyms). PCCC was located in the Pacific Northwest. In addition, the author had volunteered and worked at the ESL naturalization program of PCCC since 2007. PCCC had a cozy and familial ambience because of the friendly atmosphere that the staff had created. One side of PCCC had three newly furnished classrooms, and the other side had its main office. PCCC provided legal, educational and various other services for Chinese-speaking

immigrants (Chinese Information and Service Center (CISC), 2011). Many of the adult students at PCCC were retired or could not find jobs. They depended on their children or received state or government assistance, including food stamps, cash assistance, and medical care. PCCC had many stories on its website that illustrated how the center has changed Asian immigrants' lives (CISC, 2011). In this official website, PCCC stated that there were more and more potential clients who needed help from the center in various respects because of the increasing number of immigrants from Asia.

As a non-profit organization, PCCC's budget mostly relied on city and state funding. As a result, volunteers were crucial for PCCC. PCCC had about 60 staff and 400 volunteers. In the ESL naturalization program, there was one staff member and about 20 volunteers overseeing six naturalization and three ESL courses. Volunteer teachers taught most classes. Naturalization classes and ESL classes were offered at PCCC based on the quarterly system. Although both courses were conducted bilingually, ESL classes focused on daily life English, and naturalization classes focused on the naturalization exam, which had certain required teaching materials based on USCIS documents, including the naturalization application form and U.S. history and civic textbooks. Based on the 2011 PCCC student profiles, about 25.6% of students at PCCC were 65 years old or older; 44 % of students were from 50 to 64 years old; the oldest student in the program was 87 years old. Students were mainly immigrants from China (75.9%), Taiwan (3%) and Vietnam (16.5%). About 59% of students were female, and 41% were male. There are about 10–18 students in each class. Students' ages vary significantly. The younger students are in their 20s or 30s. The older students are in their 70s or 80s. There are obviously more female students than male students. During the classes, younger students tend to help older adult students because younger students are usually more competent in English. In addition, younger Cantonese-speaking students often help older ones to translate from Mandarin to Cantonese.

The research participants were recruited from the volunteer teachers and older adult students at the naturalization program of PCCC. The population of student participants was a mix of older adult Chinese immigrants, both Mandarin and Cantonese speakers, who had been in the United States for a minimum of four years and were over 65 years old. Student participants could not be native English speakers. It was necessary that the research student participants were 65 years old or older because the focus was on older adults. Using Peirce's investment model, their investment in English in the United States was conducted. The research student participants lived in the United States for more than four years because the focus is on their life experience in the United States. The teacher participants were volunteer naturalization teachers who had been teaching naturalization English at PCCC for at least six months. The teacher participants were also the teachers of the student participants because the author intended to know the student participants through the teacher participants. Teachers who were familiar with the system and students at PCCC were able to describe students' behaviors in class and their progress in English. Teacher participants only reported the behaviors and progress in English of the students. The author was able to abstract from their reports and see the relationship between various social identities and ESL learning.

Volunteer teachers teach the students for at least one quarter (10 weeks). Teachers usually stay for only one or two quarters because they are volunteers or interns from nearby universities. Teachers teach the students based on the textbook and lesson plans created by PCCC. Teachers teach the naturalization content to prepare the students for the naturalization interview.

The participants at PCCC were chosen based on the author's access to the school and the older adult student population. Older adult students who came to PCCC for naturalization class intended to become U.S. citizens. The Chinese-speaking immigrants who were included in this study were older adult students who had beginning or intermediate level English comprehension. The Chinese immigrants who were excluded from this study might be fluent English speakers because advanced English speakers often studied for the naturalization test on their own. Chinese immigrants who could not naturalize (such as undocumented immigrants) or did not intend to naturalize were not likely to attend PCCC. According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration

Statistics (2012), about 1.2% of undocumented immigrants (about 130,000 people) were from China. In addition, Chinese immigrants who did not live in the urban area where PCCC was located might not be able to attend the class because of limited transportation options.

Four individual older adult students were recruited to participate in this study because this inquiry method focused on depth. With four participants, this study could have an in-depth description of each individual but also compare various cases in multiple social discourses with peers, teachers or family members in various settings. The author examined how student participants engaged in social discourses. The author also examined how the participants defined their values, beliefs, and lifestyles. The participants were selected based on their ages, gender, and social-economic status.

### **3. Naturalization program at PCCC**

PCCC had three classrooms. There were eight tables in the classrooms and two chairs for each table. Students usually sat with the same classmates but they could choose to sit with different classmates if they preferred. Students listened intensively and responded with a series of questions to the teacher. The author noticed there were usually more female students than male students. In one of the classes the author observed, there were 11 female students and only five male students. Based on the informal conversation with the students, husbands often have to work full time and cannot attend the classes. On many occasions, wives naturalized first and husbands either naturalized later or stayed as permanent residents.

The students were not quiet in the classroom. They switched back and forth between Chinese and English. Students were very interested in what the teacher said. They talked with others in Chinese to make sure they understood their teacher. They also made comments constantly. For example, if one student answered the teacher's question promptly, others might comment: "She must study very hard at home" or "What is your trick to memorize these sentences?" The class was usually conducted in English for English-speaking teachers and in Chinese for Chinese-speaking teachers. About half of the students' first language was Mandarin, and the other half spoke Cantonese and limited Mandarin. Sometimes students translated what the teacher said from English to Mandarin and from Mandarin to Cantonese. The classrooms were noisy, often with English, Mandarin, and Cantonese spoken at the same time.

Many of the students in the ESL/Naturalization program at PCCC were in their 60s or older. Mr Lin, one of the older adult student participants, was surprised when he walked in the classroom for the first time. "I found most of the students are over 60 years old, and some are even around 80 years old." Indeed, it is not uncommon for students at PCCC to start learning English at an older adult stage.

Older adult students in the program mostly were retired. They lived in senior housing alone or with their spouse. Others might work at health/care centers or restaurants. Many of them lived far away from PCCC and spent one to two hours per round trip traveling to and from the center. They had to work, take care of their families, and spend time taking a bus to PCCC to learn naturalization content in English. Based on my conversation with the students at PCCC, many of them were so busy that they did not have time for studying at home. According to Mr Wu, one of the volunteer teacher participants, some of his students hurried in to the class after work. Some of them had to leave immediately after the class to work. One of his students got off work at 2am but still attended the 9:30 am class.

#### **3.1. Naturalization exam and preparation**

Immigrants who wish to naturalize must pass the naturalization exam. Although there are some exceptions, most immigrants must take the exam in English (USCIS, 2011). The exam includes testing applicants' personal information, U.S. history, and U.S. government, using both an oral interview and a writing test. The vocabulary in the naturalization content could be difficult, with uncommon words such as "alimony, allegiance, and habitual drunkard" (USCIS, 2011). Students might have to

explain these words during the interviews. Based on my observation, students had difficulties understanding words such as “marital status” or “address.” Even in advanced classes, the vocabulary in the naturalization content might take the students one or two years to memorize and understand. According to Ms Chen, “there are many vocabulary in naturalization test, and I cannot answer if I don’t understand the questions.” In addition, students were required to have basic English communication skills because naturalization officers could ask questions they thought were appropriate to test the students’ ESL abilities.

The naturalization exam was very stressful for the participants but also influential to their ESL learning. Preparing for the exam gave the students the chance to get out of their comfort zone and to work on their English. They knew that it was a learning opportunity about U.S. society and English. According to Ms Chen, “for the naturalization exam, the contents are also useful. When I enter U.S., I can understand the words because I have gone through the N-400 forms.” Ms Chen stated that the naturalization content was useful. She knew all the words the border patrol asked her when she entered the U.S. from Canada. According to Ms Wong, “The test forces us to study English. Maybe we needed the pressure before taking the test.” Ms Wong studied English in other senior centers or churches, but she did not do as well. The reason might be that she did not have to pass the naturalization interview at that time. Beyond preparing for the test, some students were becoming interested in learning English for daily life. According to Mr Lin, “I want to actually learn something, not just pass the interview.” Mr Kuo still came to PCCC to study ESL regularly after passing the test. It showed he wanted to make his daily life more convenient, so he kept going to ESL classes. The naturalization test inspired many older adult immigrant participants to start studying English.

Preparing for the naturalization interview might also change participants’ learning strategies and identities. According to Norton’s investment model, a learner’s ESL learning is highly related to his/her identity. Ms Wong failed the exam twice. She used to focus on memorization of the content. Now, she decided to take her time learning English and understanding the content. She also stated that she wanted to talk with English speakers. After failing twice, she realized that memorization and studying alone did not work. She changed her learning methods and thinking about integrating into the community. Ms Wong’s focus on daily life English showed that she wanted to integrate into the mainstream community. In short, she changed her identity from an outsider to a participant of the mainstream society because of the naturalization test.

### **3.2. Experience of immigrants and naturalization**

From a social perspective, Mr Kuo and Mr Lin had very limited interaction with English speakers. When asked about “What do you do in your free time?” the most common answer was studying English or watching TV. Both participants also stated that they read a Chinese newspaper daily. According to Su and Conaway (1995), the most helpful source in finding information is the Chinese community newspaper for Chinese immigrants in the U.S. The Chinese newspaper seems to be an important source for immigrants to know about news either in the Chinese community or outside of the Chinese community. Even though they did not have full time jobs or did not go to school full time, they might still have a busy schedule. According to Mr Kuo, he shopped at Chinese supermarkets. He went shopping there every other day. It was also an exercise for him. Taking long walks, gardening and going to supermarkets were his main activities and hobbies. Mr Kuo mostly watched local weather forecast when he watched English news. Mr Lin’s daily activities included watching Chinese and Taiwanese news, exercising at the apartment gym, and writing articles. His articles could be seen in local community newspapers. The topics often related to current Chinese news or local Chinese communities. He also wrote articles on his own websites. Both participants’ daily activities were mostly by themselves and did not require them to speak English.

Ms Wong and Ms Chen were the caregivers of the family and had more opportunities to speak English than the other two participants. Ms Wong took care of her grandchild while her daughter was at work. Even though Ms Wong did not work, sometimes she was still too busy to study for the naturalization exam. Ms Wong talked with her grandchildren in English. Her grandchildren taught her

naturalization content. Ms Chen's husband was over 80 years old. She took care of her husband and the international students at home. She also took care of the pets. Both participants only spoke English to the people whom they took care of. It showed their social network was quite limited.

### 3.2.1. *Immigration experience*

Most recent Chinese-speaking immigrants had been family-sponsored immigrants. About 75% were admitted as immediate family members, including spouse, unmarried children, and parents (Zhou & Gatewood, 2000). Ms Chen came to the U.S. because she married a U.S. citizen. Mr Kuo came to the U.S. because his sibling sponsored him. Ms Wong and Mr Lin came to the U.S. because their children sponsored them. None of the participants came to the U.S. because of an occupation.

### 3.3. *Reason to naturalize*

The student participants intended to naturalize for various reasons. All four students participated at the ESL program to prepare for their naturalization exams. All four participants were self-motivated. Students in this program intended to learn English and naturalize. Why did older adult immigrants want to naturalize even if it might be so difficult for them? Every participant had his or her reasons to naturalize. According to Ms Wong, she could not go traveling with her friends because she did not carry a U.S. passport. Some immigrants might naturalize because they needed to take care of their family members. Ms Wong's daughter was a single mother. Ms Wong had to take care of her granddaughter while her daughter was at work. She wanted to go back to China but was worried her daughter could not take care of herself and her daughter. She chose to become a citizen to be with her family. In addition, Ms Wong did not have a job or savings so she had to apply for federal assistance. As a U.S. citizen, she would be able to apply for certain benefits. Some participants tried to naturalize because they did not have close relatives or contacts in China anymore. Ms Chen stated that she had only one daughter who lived in Canada. Her husband was an American. She did not have frequent contact with relatives in China. She only went back to China twice in the past seven years. According to Mr Lin, there were mainly two reasons that older adults here want to naturalize. First, they want to sponsor their children to come here. Second, they want to apply for public assistance. In addition, Mr Lin stated: "if you stay here, you want to feel that you belong here." From the teacher's point of view, Justin stated that students at PCCC wanted to naturalize because: "a lot of them want to vote, have U.S. passports, and have more freedom. America is free, and they love America. They seem to have a lot of patriotism toward their new homeland." Students and teachers could have quite different perspectives. It showed that there were various and multiple reasons to naturalize. Students might try to present more "appropriate" answers when asked by teachers or USCIS officers.

Chinese immigrants may not naturalize if they have significant family or financial ties in China. Mr Kuo, Ms Chen, and Ms Wong applied for naturalization, while Mr Lin was still not certain. Some students at PCCC were hesitant to naturalize because China did not allow dual citizenship. Therefore, once Chinese citizens naturalized, they were not able to enter China without a visa or receive pensions from the Chinese government. For example, Mr Lin was still hesitant about applying for the U.S. citizenship because "If I become an U.S. citizen, my registration in China and insurance might be cancelled." Mr Lin might lose his pension after he naturalizes, so the benefits of naturalization are smaller than the negative consequences.

Taiwanese immigrants might still naturalize even if they have family or financial ties in Taiwan because Taiwan allows dual citizenship. Mr Kuo still had an apartment in Taipei and he did not want to sell it because he wanted to have a place to stay once he returns to Taiwan. Mr Kuo did not worry about losing his identity as a Taiwanese citizen. In contrast to Chinese immigrants, he might feel the transition was smooth. He could still go back to Taiwan using his Taiwanese passport. In fact, he was considering returning to Taiwan after naturalization for medical reasons; according to Mr Kuo, the medical care was a serious issue. He said: "Now I don't have any health insurance. I bring a lot of medicine back to the U.S. I can't get sick. My wife also doesn't have any health insurance." He also stated that Taiwan had universal insurance and he and his wife might move back to Taiwan after

naturalization for medical care. Taiwanese immigrants might feel that Taiwan and U.S. identities coexist because they could move back and forth between two countries.

Participants came to PCCC to prepare for the naturalization exam in English. Each participant has his or her own reasons whether to naturalize or not. Reasons could be numerous. Most immigrants from China and Taiwan felt more secure once they became U.S. citizens because they could receive federal assistance, including health insurance if they met certain requirements. In addition, they could sponsor their family to come to the U.S. They also felt they were not foreigners anymore. Carrying a U.S. passport and being able to vote were also important.

Their decision seemed to relate to their identities, such as their nationality, financial situation, family ties and a sense of belonging toward U.S. In order to naturalize, the participants were required to learn English. The finding showed that this population had a harder time learning English because of isolation from the mainstream community.

#### 4. Discussion

Why did the participants naturalize? Living in the U.S. for at least 5 years, some wished to feel a sense of belonging. However, even though they wanted to naturalize, they might not have been ready to assimilate to American culture. They were not exposed to the mainstream culture because of the language barrier, so they might have a hard time finding common ground with non-Chinese speakers. They might naturalize for many other reasons, including sponsoring their family members to come to the U.S. or receive federal public assistance. In Peirce's study (1995), immigrant women invest in English in order to seek better jobs or participate in the mainstream society. In McKay and Wong's study (1996), immigrant teenagers invest in English in order to leave ESL programs and go into "usual" classes. According to Peirce (1995), the status of English learners is not equal to native English speakers, and learners have to invest in English in order to attain resources that they cannot attain otherwise, and in turn increase their social capital. In this study, the participants have to invest in English to pass the naturalization interview and become U.S. citizens.

According to Peirce (1995), learners' purpose to invest in language usually relates to their identities. The reasons that the participants came to the U.S. were related to their identities. Some Taiwanese immigrants came to the U.S. for their children's education. Based on my conversation with Mr Kuo, it was common for Taiwanese wives and children to come to the U.S. while their husbands stayed in Taiwan to support their families. After the wives and children naturalized, the wives went back to Taiwan and the children stayed in the U.S. with Chinese immigrants, in contrast, it seemed that the common situation is that children sponsored the parents to come to the U.S. Chinese immigrants had to give up their identities as Chinese citizens after they naturalized. Therefore, Chinese immigrants would not naturalize if they thought they would return to China in the near future. For Chinese immigrants, taking the step towards naturalization test is a huge commitment regarding their identities, which also influences their ESL learning.

Most students at PCCC invest in English in order to naturalize. After achieving their purpose, they may stop learning English. According to the investment model, language learning is also related to participants' social context and power structure. Therefore, if educators want to encourage students to keep learning English, it is critical to encourage the students to invest in English in order to become participants in the mainstream community. All four participants enjoyed living in the U.S. because of its environment and welfare system. Mr Kuo told me: "In the U.S., air is better and houses are bigger; Taiwan is more polluted and crowded." He and his wife both studied at a community college. In their free time, he enjoyed taking long walks while his wife liked going to malls and parks. Ms Wong wanted to stay in the U.S. after visiting China. When she was in China, the traffic was so bad that she was afraid of crossing the street. She also worried about the food safety. According to Ms Wong, "I always choose what I like in supermarkets here, but I was worried choosing the food in supermarkets in China." Compared to the environment of China and Taiwan, the participants enjoyed living in the U.S. better.

Although the participants studied English to naturalize and improve their daily lives (being able to talk to building managers or read letters from the government), they also learned English for symbolic reasons. They felt they lived in America, so they were supposed to learn English. However, they might feel that they did not need to speak English because they did not go to school or work in the U.S. If students were convinced of the benefits of learning an L2 and recognized their unique status as standing between two worlds and two cultures, students might be more passionate in learning an L2 (Cook, 1999). Also, as Norton (1997) suggests, learners of English should be able to claim the ownership of English and consider themselves legitimate speakers of English. As she describes, “English belongs to the people who speak it, whether native or nonnative, whether ESL or EFL, whether standard or nonstandard, then the expansion of English in this era of rapid globalization may possibly be for the better rather than for the worse.” It might be beneficial if Chinese-speaking immigrants could be aware that they are legitimate speakers of English and that English is a valuable communication tool.

Taking the exam made the participants serious about learning English. Passing the naturalization test served as a strong force for the participants to learn English. As the participants recalled, they did not spend enough time studying at community colleges. As a result, they tried much harder at PCCC because they had to pass the test. After naturalization, the participants understood that English was still important for them in daily lives. However, many of them stopped learning English because of other priorities in their lives. Some participants assumed their role as caregivers in the family. Some students found part time jobs. For example, after Ms Chen naturalized, she had travel plans with her husband, so she could no longer attend ESL classes. Others might have felt little need to spend hours commuting to the center to learn English. They might not keep studying English after naturalization because they did not have to speak English on a daily basis. In contrast, some participants viewed naturalization class differently. Learning English became a hobby.

As Mr Lin wrote in the local community paper: I used to think that I would not be capable to learn English because of old age and a bad memory. I was also worried that my health condition would not allow me to learn English. Now I break through my burden. If I can ‘cook’ more English and spend a lot more time after class, I will be able to memorize the knowledge. Meanwhile, my brain becomes healthier due to the interests in learning and thinking.

Mr Lin has a mindset that we want older adult students to have in learning English. The naturalization test brought many older adult immigrants to the naturalization program and motivated them to study English. Many older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants who lived in isolation for many years came to learn English because of the naturalization test alone. After naturalization, while some students were still interested in learning English, many might stop learning it because they did not feel it was necessary. Therefore, it was important to let the participants understand that there were other reasons to learn English even after the naturalization test. Learning English might make their lives more pleasant and convenient.

The journey of learning English is not over after the students’ naturalization. Administrators and instructors can pay attention to activities that help the population reach out to non-Chinese communities, such as arranging tours to local communities or hosting Thanksgiving or Christmas dinners. If instructors and administrators can help older Chinese-speaking immigrant students engage with English speakers, this population will be able to understand that English for them is more of a communication tool than just for a naturalization test. The older Chinese-speaking immigrants might change their English learning methods. Eventually, they might find out that the naturalization exam is a not only a path to U.S. citizenship but also a way out of isolation.

This research study enriches the current SLA literature by distinguishing older adult learners from younger adult learners. Secondly, this research focuses on a naturalization program, where most previous research focuses on ESL programs for job training or at K-12 settings. This qualitative research contributes to SLA literature from a holistic perspective of older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants’ ESL learning.



## 5. Application and conclusion

### 5.1. USCIS policy

Naturalization test content influences immigrants' identities and ESL learning, especially for older adult Chinese immigrants, who have less incentive to learn English otherwise. By making the exam more practical with easier vocabulary, applicants might be encouraged to actually understand the words, instead of simply memorizing the difficult vocabulary, knowing they will not use these hard words in the future. In addition, the naturalization form currently asks if the applicant is a member of the Communist Party. Without the clarification, Chinese immigrants who are members of the Communist Party might hide their identities and distrust the U.S. government. The U.S. government should clarify that the Chinese immigrants who have joined the Chinese Communist Party without a choice can still naturalize. It might help this population gain a sense of acceptance from the mainstream communities.

### 5.2. Institution policy and practice

#### 5.2.1. ESL curriculum

Students at PCCC actually have different learning purposes besides taking the naturalization tests. For example, students who are married to English speakers might focus on their listening and speaking comprehension. However, learners who seek job opportunities might like to focus more on reading and writing.

The naturalization test is a stepping-stone for many older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants, which inspires them to start learning English. In many cases, naturalization curriculum is the first step many older adult Chinese-speaking immigrants take in learning English. The curriculum in the naturalization test should be embedded with stepping-stones to reach students' other goals. For example, students who wish to improve their listening skills can find more information on the textbooks or handouts.

#### 5.2.2. Cooperation with other organizations

PCCC should build upon its long-term learning goal for its students. Currently, the practice in PCCC is that most of the students only focus on the naturalization test. After the test, they stop coming to the center. PCCC should apply for funding that can integrate naturalization programs into post naturalization ESL programs. Long-term learning will be made available if both goals can be met in the same organization. Otherwise, PCCC and other organizations should cooperate to accommodate students' learning needs. For example, after a student has passed the naturalization exam, the naturalization program can then send the student to another ESL program based on student needs, either related to work training or to learning everyday English skills.

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#### Author details

Shun-Jen Hsiao<sup>1</sup>

E-mail: [Shunjen6@gmail.com](mailto:Shunjen6@gmail.com)

<sup>1</sup> Chinese Information and Service Center, Seattle, WA, USA.

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