

# Exploring Language and Culture in the Novice Chinese Classroom Through the Linguistic Landscape



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**Abstract** In this chapter, we showcase a field trip project developed and tested in a two-week Chinese immersion summer program to demonstrate how using the theoretical framework of social constructivism in combination with linguistic landscape (LL) offers novice language learners the opportunity to explore the Chinese language and culture in an authentic context. This project was designed to motivate and engage learners actively in acquiring language skills and cultural knowledge and understanding. We examine pedagogical approaches and potential benefits of using technology and LL as pedagogical resources in language education to promote learner engagement in the target language and culture in a community based context.

**Keywords** Teaching Chinese · Novice language learners · Teaching culture · Pedagogical approaches to Chinese language and culture · Social constructivism · Field trip · Technology

## 1 Introduction

Mandarin Chinese is typically perceived by English-language speakers as one of the most challenging languages to learn largely due to the complexity created by the character writing system and the tones necessary when speaking that differentiate words. Novice learners of Mandarin who are native speakers of Western languages can become discouraged and overwhelmed, in some cases even choosing to discontinue their language study beyond the first two years, due to a lack of background

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knowledge provided by their native languages in the form of cognates and alphabetic languages (Robinson, 2010). In order to make the Chinese language and culture more accessible and meaningful to learners, concepts from linguistic landscape (hereafter LL) studies were integrated into the language curriculum to actively engage novice learners in the language and culture learning process through an authentic experience in an Asian market. In this chapter, we showcase a field trip project developed and tested in our 2017 STARTALK Chinese Summer Academy to demonstrate how using the theoretical framework of social constructivism in combination with LL offers learners the opportunity to explore the Chinese language and culture in an authentic context designed to motivate and engage them actively in acquiring language skills and cultural knowledge and understanding.

## 2 Theoretical Framework: Social Constructivism

Social constructivism was developed by Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky, who claimed that language and culture are the two venues through which humans experience, communicate, and understand reality. For Vygotsky, learning is a social activity in which community plays a central role in the process of “making meaning” (1978, p. 68). He further states,

A special feature of human perception ... is the perception of real objects ... I do not see the world simply in color and shape but also as a world with sense and meaning. I do not merely see something round and black with two hands; I see a clock ... (1978, p. 39)

According to Vygotsky’s social constructivism, learning happens through social interaction and language use; knowledge is not a result of observing the world but the result of social processes and interactions. Based on such a perspective, the generation of knowledge and ideas of reality is sparked by social processes (Gergen, 1994).

Social constructivism served as a theoretical model in this study as greater emphasis was placed on learning through social interaction, and value was placed on cultural background. Using such a framework for language learning entails a variety of activities that take place in an authentic community setting. To establish such a community setting, learners are exposed to the target language through the LL. According to Landry and Bourhis (1997), “The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration” (p. 25). Learners not only observe and analyze signs, or learn the target language through the signs in the community, they also interact with “inhabitants” or with each other about the signs using the target language in the community. Learners also gain insights about the targeted community as they critically reflect on their experiences. Tying the social constructivism framework to the LL, we further explore language learning with a focus on cultural teaching and learning. Following Geertz’s (1973) definition of culture as a

“web of significance,” or the interaction of meanings attached to patterns and artifacts, we believe that teaching/learning about culture must go beyond learning of artifacts or doctrines with limited value in real life interpersonal interactions. For that reason, the LL, referred to as “research about the presence, representation, meanings and interpretation of languages displayed in public places” (Shohamy & Ben-Rafael, 2015, p. 1) underlying a culture that is mediated by peoples’ interactions in that place, offers potential for engaging language learners in a research project that provides a rich cultural learning experience. According to Shohamy and Ben-Rafael (2015),

The main goal of LL studies is to describe and identify systematic patterns of the presence and absence of languages in public spaces and to understand the motives, pressures, ideologies, reactions and decision making of people regarding the creation of LL in its varied forms (p. 1).

### 3 Review of Relevant Research

#### 3.1 *Linguistic Landscape and Foreign/Second Language Learning*

In one of the early studies that tied LL to second language acquisition, Cenoz and Gorter (2008) explored the potential for using language on public signs as additional language input outside of the classroom. Viewing the LL as “authentic, contextualized input which is part of the social context” (p. 268), they suggested language on public signs may help second language learners develop pragmatic competence. For example, a bilingual sign “Are you thirsty?” on a vending machine serves as a request to buy a drink. They also pointed out the possible use of the LL in developing learners’ multimodal literacy skills (for the LL is oftentimes multimodal), fostering multicompetencies (as learners differentiate among different languages), and raising language awareness (as learners become more attentive to the symbolic and affective dimensions of language).

Following Cenoz and Gorter (2008), scholars further identified pedagogical benefits of incorporating an LL approach into foreign language education, especially in teaching English as a foreign language due to the ubiquitous presence of English language on public signs. By documenting and analyzing English language use on public signs in Oaxaca, Mexico, Sayer (2010) argued that foreign language teachers can use such LL projects to help students connect classroom learning to the authentic world outside of the classroom as well as cultivate creative and analytical thinking as students examine the sociolinguistic context of language use. Incorporating the investigation of the LL of Taipei into their EFL classroom, Chern and Dooley (2014) suggested using an “English literacy walk” activity as a way to encourage language learning and critical English reading practices among students in the course of their everyday activities. Hewitt-Bradshaw (2014) modeled the use of

Critical Discourse Analysis to LL data in the Caribbean Creole context and explored ways of utilizing such analysis to develop students' critical language awareness.

The pedagogical benefits of using LL perspectives in language teaching have also been documented in empirical studies. For example, Rowland (2012) had his EFL students in Japan document and analyze their local LL and concluded that LL projects are particularly valuable in developing students' symbolic competence and critical literacy skills. The application of LL projects in language teaching is not limited to the EFL context. The LL and Second Language Education Colloquium at the 2016 American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL) conference and the recently published volume entitled *Language Teaching in the Linguistic Landscape: Mobilizing Pedagogy in Public Space* (Malinowski et al., 2020), showcased the recent efforts in expanding the scale of applying LL in second language classrooms. Lozano et al. (2020) integrated LL projects in first-year Spanish-language courses in New York City and described the implementation of learner-centered fieldwork in the linguistic landscape. They reported the potential of student-centered and structured LL projects for creating meaningful and authentic language and intercultural learning beyond the traditional classroom setting. Lee and Choi (2020) explored the employment of the linguistic landscape as a pedagogical tool in a Korean as a Foreign Language classroom, through which they examined how LL projects can ensure learners' interactions with local communities and examined how the "inquiry-based, student-led, and community-focused project" (p. 183) impacted the students' understanding of the target language and culture as well as local multilingualism. Richardson (2020) incorporated LL projects in a German language program at a university to assist language learners to recognize human agency within cultural narratives.

### 3.2 *Linguistic Landscape and Cultural Learning*

The teaching of culture and importance of intercultural competence has been the focus of much scholarly inquiry both within and outside the classroom (Byram, 1989; Kramsch, 1993; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Moeller & Nugent, 2014; Moeller & Osborn, 2014). At the same time, increased studies in LL have powered the interest in bringing cultural learning into the language classroom in order to make cultural learning more accessible and authentic. According to Cenoz and Gorter (2008), the languages evident in the LL index issues of identity and cultural globalization while the use of LL in language learning provides an excellent opportunity for authentic input for building language and cultural awareness.

Echoing that, Dagenais et al. (2009) carried out a school project in which participants took pictures of their LL and related them to multilingualism and multiculturalism. As a result of an EFL LL project carried out in Japan, Rowland (2012) proposed that the LL provides valuable opportunities for language learners to "bear different lenses and perspectives on culturally ingrained beliefs and values" (p. 502). Through an English as a Foreign Language LL project undertaken in Mexico, Sayer

(2010) presented a framework that distinguishes between “intercultural and intra-cultural uses”, as well as iconic and innovative uses of language on signs (p. 143). In the application of the LL to Caribbean Creole language environments, Hewitt-Bradshaw (2014) found that teachers obtained opportunities “to foster a culture of inquiry,” and students learned “to understand their history and culture” (p. 160).

With increasing attention to the LL world-wide and “the inextricable link between language and culture” (Van Houten & Shelton, 2018, p. 35), integrating LL can provide a rich source of cultural input for language learners (Curtin, 2009). In this chapter, specifically, we adopt Berger’s (1984) definition of culture as both dynamic and dialectic; culture “is at base an all-embracing socially constructed world of subjectively and inter-subjectively experienced meanings. Culture must be constructed and reconstructed as a continuous process” (Berger in Wuthnow et al., 1984, p. 25). As Fenner (2017) summarized, a member of a particular culture both reflects and influences that culture; only by gaining insight into the other can one gain an outside view of oneself. Therefore, in the foreign language classroom, culture should be viewed as an integral part of language learning rather than an addition to language learning. In Fenner’s (2017) words, it is a matter of learning through culture as well as learning about it.

## 4 Research Question

Despite the burgeoning scholarship on using LL in foreign/second language teaching, the focus has not been extended to the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language and/or using LL with beginning learners. Our study attempts to fill this gap by exploring the possibilities of integrating LL perspectives into Mandarin Chinese classrooms with novice learners. Specifically, we ask the following research question:

In what ways can the field of LL assist novice Chinese learners to promote language and cultural proficiency?

## 5 Method

### 5.1 *Study Design and Research Focus*

The STARTALK Chinese Summer Academy at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln is a 14-day Mandarin Chinese immersion program for high school students with no or very little knowledge of Chinese. Guided by World Readiness Language Standards for Learning Languages developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (2015), our program aimed to ensure a balance of language input and output through the integration of authentic texts, aural and visual

media that provide language and cultural input as well as learning tasks that actively engage learners with the language and culture in three modes of communication (interpersonal, interpretive, presentational). The program has been running successfully since 2012. Typically, on the fifth day of the program, students participate in a field trip to several local Asian grocery stores and a Vietnamese café as part of their cultural learning experience. Students are provided a small allowance to make purchases at the store and are also encouraged to use as much Chinese as they can with the shop employees and cashier. Equipped with an iPad, students are encouraged to document their shopping experience using their iPad and by creating a digital presentation after the field trip.

In previous years, the aim of the field trip activity was focused on cultural learning, but by embedding an LL-based component, students, equipped with an iPad, were able to capture their learning experiences in images containing language, products, and practices they observed in the store which they could later examine, discuss, and explore to arrive at a deeper understanding of the perspectives of the culture. The digital presentations created by students, usually a digital poster using Pic Collage or a short video using Adobe Spark Video or Knowmia, not only provided evidence of target language and culture learning but also documented the linguistic and cultural diversity of the local community. For the purpose of the current study, to further explore the potential of using the LL as a pedagogical resource in foreign language education, modifications were made to our field trip activity to ensure “informed, intentional, and direct pedagogical intervention for learning in the LL” (Malinowski, 2015, p. 99).

Echoing other researchers using LL as a pedagogical tool in foreign/second language education, we found ourselves in a similar dilemma when it came to project design (Rowland, 2012; Chesnut et al., 2013; Malinowski, 2016). On the one hand, we wanted to make the project as open-ended and student-led as possible so that students could investigate the LL freely and we could avoid leading students toward specific aspects about target language and/or culture. On the other hand, we had to devise the project in a carefully guided manner to prepare our novice student researchers for an inquiry-based project. As pointed out by other LL researchers, more guidance could be beneficial not only at the initial stage, but also at a later stage when pursuing learning opportunities emerged from student work (Chesnut et al., 2013; Malinowski, 2016). Another reason why a more guided inquiry was suggested had a lot to do with the logistics. This was particularly true with our program. It was almost too ambitious to even think about using such a project with high school students who had only learned Chinese for 4 days and where all activities had to be completed within a few hours. The decision to incorporate LL was based on evidence of incidental learning that occurred among learners from previous years’ student projects. When it came to making modifications to our original field trip design, our guiding principle was to provide more guidance for students without making the task too cognitively demanding.

We added a brief pre-trip discussion/brainstorming task preceding the shopping experience to determine prior knowledge and to prepare students for the trip (see [Appendix A](#)). In addition, this pre-excursion task allowed the researchers to

determine and assess possible gains in attitudes, knowledge, and language skills. We also provided a handout to facilitate note-taking during their trip (see [Appendix B](#)). In pairs, learners were assigned two research questions adapted from Kløver's (1997) grocery store ethnography exercise and were tasked to create and deliver a presentation in response to these questions. To further guide students to reflect on their experience, we also tailored the journal prompt questions on the day of the field trip so that students could compare, make connections, and gain a deeper understanding of the community (see [Appendix A](#) for more details). Unlike previous studies on foreign language learning in the LL, we decided not to formally introduce and define or explain LL research during class. As mentioned earlier, it would be too ambitious to model LL studies during class time and to conduct an LL research project in approximately two hours given the intensive nature of our program. It could also be cognitively too challenging to assign related literature to our students given their age and academic preparation. In a similar light, we decided not to formally introduce the term "LL". Without adequate introduction to the term and what LL research entails, using the term could mislead our students and narrow the scope of their exploration since our goal was to use LL as a pedagogical tool to bridge culture learning in the language classroom with culture learning in an authentic real-world setting. Based on previous experience with this shopping excursion, we knew our students would collect abundant "LL data" in their photos and/or videos, even though they were not formally taught about LL research. This decision was made in order to allow students to focus their attention to the cultural aspect of language learning but not limit them to the linguistic aspects.

Each of the three researchers played multiple roles in the current study. One was the STARTALK Chinese Academy director, who did not serve as an instructor in the Academy, but was one of the drivers who took students to the stores and accompanied them during the field trip. The second researcher was one of the instructors of this year's Academy who facilitated the field trip project, conducted the data collection, and recorded field notes after participating in the field trip. The third researcher was a former instructor of the Academy who did not participate in the teaching and the field trip this year which allowed her to provide an outside perspective when reviewing and analyzing the data. All three researchers collaborated throughout the project, from discussing the research design, to data analysis, and finally to the writing of this chapter.

## ***5.2 The Context of the Study***

Before the field trip, students had just finished learning about one of the most important Chinese festivals, the Spring Festival, during which they experienced the customs, clothing, music, artifacts, and food associated with the festival. For example, in the lesson about "Chinese New Year foods," students not only learned about popular foods associated with the Chinese New Year, they also were involved first-hand in the preparation of these foods. As part of one of the classroom projects,

“Our Dumplings,” students worked in groups composing a shopping list of ingredients they needed to buy to make their favorite dumplings. The field trip provided a venue for students to explore Chinese food in an authentic setting, shop for the appropriate ingredients, and negotiate a sale in the target language. In order to extend students’ attention to things besides food, a field trip handout provided more observational angles, such as the organization of the grocery store, the communication between people in the store, and the behaviors of people in the store. In addition, to encourage students to explore the Chinese language and culture during the trip, the instructors facilitated a pre-trip discussion where students shared their opinions about how cultural values, attitudes, and beliefs are manifested in everyday life.

To further pursue students’ understanding of cultural practices and perspectives, students were asked to respond to post-trip reflection questions focused on comparing students’ previous grocery store experiences in their own culture with this field trip experience. In addition to the pre-trip, during-trip, and post-trip activities that facilitated students’ active involvement in learning both language and culture throughout the field trip, each pair of students also presented a final project based on what they had discovered from the trip and from their own follow-up research. As part of the presentation, students were encouraged to voice their own impressions and opinions. In order to motivate and promote student participation and active engagement in the learning process, each student could earn *renminbi* (Chinese currency) based on their active participation. At the end of the Academy, the staff set up a “temporary Chinese-style grocery store” focused on what they had learned from the field trip, where they were able to use the *renminbi* they had earned to buy Chinese souvenirs. This step-by-step language and cultural learning process allowed each student to voice what they had learned in the classroom, interact with cultural products and practices during each stage of the field experience, exchange perspectives and share final projects, and, finally, apply what they had learned through the shopping experience in the re-constructed store using Chinese currency. Throughout this learning process, students not only consolidated what they had learned, but also had the opportunity to experience first-hand what they could do with language, and equally important, were able to identify the gaps in their language and cultural learning. Such a discovery approach to learning promoted autonomous learning and self-regulation in the students, important characteristics when pursuing a non-Western language such as Chinese where persistence determines retention and mastery.

### ***5.3 Background of the Asian Markets***

The field trip occurred in the afternoon of the fifth day of the Academy. It included a visit to two ethnic grocery stores and one Vietnamese restaurant located in a highly immigrant populated portion of Lincoln, which is also home to many of the city’s ethnic grocery stores. The first grocery store, the Oriental Market, is housed in a stand-alone, one-story building. Owned and operated by a Thai family, the Oriental

Market is probably the largest “pan-Asian” market in Lincoln, featuring food and products from a variety of Asian countries and areas, including China, Taiwan, Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Korea, Indonesia, and the Philippines (personal conversation with one of the store employees). The majority of its regular customers are college students from these Asian countries. Residents of Lincoln and neighboring towns also shop for Asian foods, sometimes with their international friends. The Oriental Market has a large selection of dry goods with instant noodles being the store’s biggest seller. The store also has a variety of fresh produce, meat, frozen foods, and kitchenware. The market has been in operation for over 45 years.

The second grocery store and the Vietnamese restaurant, the Little Saigon Oriental Market<sup>1</sup> and the Bánhwich Café, are located on 27th and Vine streets and are part of what is known as Saigon Plaza, together with another Vietnamese Restaurant (Phở Factory), a travel agency (NGA Travel), and a nail salon (VS Nail Supply). Thuy Nguyen, a Vietnamese immigrant, opened the Little Saigon Oriental Market in 2002 and now her family business has expanded into a plaza with six lots, with three of them managed by Thuy and her children (the grocery store, the cafe, and the Phở restaurant). The Saigon Plaza not only brought together the Nguyen family members (Staats, 2012), but also brought a taste of Asian food and culture to the community. The Little Saigon Oriental Market has a large selection of Vietnamese foods and products as well as Chinese, Indian, Korean, and Japanese food. The store is frequented by Asian customers, especially Vietnamese families in Lincoln. The Bánhwich Café features specialty Vietnamese sandwiches, bánh mì, with over 17 flavors inspired by Vietnamese, Korean, Chinese, and Thai cuisine. The restaurant also serves bubble tea and frozen yogurt in a multitude of flavors. With a distinctive Asian feel, the plaza is now catering to a larger international clientele.

#### **5.4 Data Collection**

In the 2017 Academy, we had a total of 20 students. They were seated at four tables, with each table consisting of five students and a teacher facilitator, who was assigned to assist student learning from the first day of the Academy. Prior to leaving for the market, students were introduced to the field trip project by a researcher of this project who also served as an instructor in the Academy. Time was given for students to ask questions about the market excursion; however, no questions were raised as everyone seemed eager and excited to go to the Asian markets. Then, students were invited to brainstorm about two pre-trip questions at their tables (see [Appendix A](#)). The teacher facilitators were restricted from contributing to the group discussion, unless there were questions raised by students that needed clarification. Group discussions were recorded and collected for later analysis. After the

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<sup>1</sup>The store is marked as “Little Saigon Asian Grocery Store” on Google map (see [Fig. 1](#)). We stay with “Little Saigon Oriental Market” as this is the way the shop sign reads.

discussions, students were paired up and each pair was assigned two of the 10 research questions adapted from Kluver's (1997) grocery store ethnography exercise (see Appendix A). Students were given time to work with their partner, reading and reviewing the questions. At the same time, the researcher distributed a handout for each student to jot down notes during their trip (see Appendix B).

During the field trip, all students first visited the Oriental Market, and then headed to the shopping plaza where they visited the Little Saigon Oriental Market and the Bánhwich Café (see Fig. 1. Field Trip Route). Some students worked together with their paired partner, while some chose to work on their own. As each student received an iPad on the first day of the Academy to be used both inside and outside of class during the Academy, students brought their iPads to the field trip. They used their iPads either for taking pictures or recording videos about the trip based on their own observations. As one of the instructors in the Academy, the researcher was responsible for assisting with Academy activities and monitoring how students were doing. Therefore, the researcher's presence in the field trip was quite normal to students. In their trip, students sometimes raised questions to the researcher. Most of their questions were about products in the store that they had not seen before, such as the name of a product and how it tasted. To avoid any information intrusion, the researcher only answered what students asked and did not provide extra comments.

After the field trip, all students were driven back to campus. Students then created presentations based on the two assigned research questions and completed a post-trip reflection journal containing five prompts (see Appendix A). As part of the



**Fig. 1** Field Trip Route Map data from OpenStreetMap (<https://www.openstreetmap.org/copyright>)

Academy routine, students uploaded their presentation products onto Seesaw, a student-driven digital portfolio, before their presentation. Student presentation products were later collected and analyzed by the researchers. Student presentations were also recorded for data collection. Students used English during the presentation; the researcher and other teachers gave brief comments occasionally and provided time for class discussions. Compared to the class discussion prior to the field trip, the discussion after the field trip was rich and generated excitement as students shared “new and different” ideas from their field trip.

As shown in Table 1, our dataset included class discussions, video and observation notes prior to the field trip, during-trip observation notes, student field trip reports, student projects (3 PowerPoint presentations and 7 video presentations), class presentation videos and observation notes, student journals, and more than 50 photos taken by researchers. We also collected student responses to online discussion prompts before the onset of the program. In their posts, students introduced themselves and shared their knowledge and views about Chinese language and culture. This information was collected to further help us understand our students’ trip experiences.

## 5.5 Data Analysis

Our approach to data analysis was a qualitative content analysis as detailed by Sayer (2010) that described the dataset and identified connections and patterns across parts of the data. Class videos of pre-trip discussions and post-trip presentations were reviewed and summarized with a focus on students’ cultural and language awareness. Class observations and field notes were compared and discussed. The analysis of student field-trip projects was two-tiered: an examination of the assigned questions of each student group and the examples/photos that supported their responses. We also examined the images students included in their projects by counting and sorting them into three categories: food/drinks, non-food/drink, language/LL. The last category is not mutually exclusive to the first two categories as a photo of a pack of snacks can also feature the languages used on the package. Therefore, such a photo could also be counted in the food/drinks category. Similarly, a photo of a handwritten “on sale” sign could be counted in both the non-food/

**Table 1** Summary of data set

Tasks	Data
Pre-trip group discussion	34-min video recording
Field trip projects	3 PowerPoint presentations, 6 Spark videos, 1 iMovie video
Field trip presentation	Video & observation notes
Post-trip reflection	10 student journals/texts
Canvas discussion	Text

drinks and the language/LL category. Of the 10 sets of field trip partners, three groups created PowerPoint slides as their projects. We coded the texts (their answers to the two assigned questions) for themes in relation to language and culture learning (the 3 P's and World Readiness Standards<sup>2</sup>); then, we counted and categorized the photos students selected for their presentation. Seven groups created video presentations with Adobe Spark Video, an app that allows users to create a personalized video with photos, texts, and video footage. Six of the videos included only photos and texts; therefore, we treated and coded these videos the way we coded PowerPoint presentations, reading the text and categorizing the photos according to themes/patterns. One group included segments of video footage they recorded during the trip as well as photos and texts. We coded only the photos and texts for the first round of coding so that it was comparable to the other groups' projects. Then, we coded the video segments separately for additional themes.

## 6 Results and Interpretation

Based on the theme, "Experiencing Chinese Festivals through the Five Senses," that guided instruction and learning throughout the Academy, this field trip was designed not only to expose students to authentic Chinese language and cultural input, but also to apply what they learned in the classroom to the real world they encounter outside the classroom.

### 6.1 Learning About Culture

Both student writing and presentations show abundant evidence of awareness of cultural products and practices. Since our students visited two grocery stores and one restaurant during the field trip, it was not surprising that food and drinks received a lot of their attention. As shown in Table 2, 50% of the photos in the student presentations consisted of food and drinks; of the 10 groups, two used only photos of food and drinks. Those photos featuring non-food/drinks items, such as eating and cooking utensils, medicine, interior decoration, register, aisles and shelves, were less frequently selected by students in their presentations, with the exception of one group who selected an equal amount of food and non-food photos. The remaining groups included 0 to 30% of non-food/drinks photos. Figure 2 is an example of a Pic Collage presentation created by our students, with all the pictures carefully selected to illustrate their answers to the two research questions about store organization and the relationship between food and culture.

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<sup>2</sup>See <https://www.actfl.org/resources/world-readiness-standards-learning-languages/standards-summary>

**Table 2** Summary of photos used in student presentations

	Minimum	Maximum
Number of photos	8	45
Number of food & drinks photos	4	44
% of food & drinks photos	50%	100%
Number of non-food/drinks photos	0	12
% of non-food/drinks photos	0%	50%



**Fig. 2** Pic Collage presentation created by McKenna & Sam

Of all the food/drinks items mentioned in writing and/or featured in presentation photos, we found that those not typically sold in American grocery stores were most frequently selected by students. For example, most students were amazed at the selection of subtropical fruits such as jackfruit, durian, and lychee, as well as the seafood-flavored snacks such as seaweed and squid snacks. Students also noticed items that were not new to them but usually carried in American grocery stores with much less variety, or in smaller quantity. For example, they found a large selection of noodles and big stacks of rice in the stores and were able to connect such a phenomenon to the shared cultural practice of eating rice and noodles as staple foods in East and Southeast Asian countries. Another example consisted of the different types of sauces and spices for cooking. Noticing how many choices of sauces of bitter, sour, and spicy flavors were available on the shelves, one group conjectured that “From what it seems like, the Chinese love foods that give a special experience,

that fill the mouth with a lot of flavor” (McKenna & Sam, presentation). Of course, the large variety of condiments and salad dressings available in American grocery stores suggest that Chinese people are not the only people who love to “fill the mouth with a lot of flavor,” but the students were correct in pointing out which condiments and sauces are used for cooking and how they are used is usually associated with specific cultures. Students also tended to notice items that are familiar but different in flavors or packaging. For example, they were excited to find KitKat in green tea flavor, mango flavored ice cream, strawberry milk popsicles, Jell-O in panda/cat/soccer-shaped containers, tea cans/packs labeled as “jasmine tea” or “dried rose”. Besides food and drinks, students also noticed a few items typically associated with Chinese or Asian culture. For example, they took photos of porcelain dining ware, herbal infusion, and bamboo mats used to make sushi rolls.

Most of our students noticed the diverse Asian cultures represented in the store. Some of them were able to identify specific items from a specific culture. For example, one student pointed out that the store “... is full of a wide range of different products from Asian countries that can’t often be found in other American markets, like durian and lychee fruits, Chinese and Japanese porcelain products, and Vietnamese Phở mixes” (Matt & Breanna, presentation). Some students described the Asian stores as being more “diverse”, more “accepting” of and “tolerant” of other cultures. Students’ responses echoed Rowland’s (2012) observation that a pedagogical LL project can increase language learners’ appreciation of language diversity or, in our case, both language and culture diversity, or lack thereof, in their local community. Such appreciation was also evident when students compared cultures, connected classroom learning to everyday life, and gained a new understanding of their community, which is our next theme.

## 6.2 *Comparison, Connection, and Community*

In their description of the field trip experience, students made comparisons at multiple levels. Comparing Asian grocery stores to large grocery chain stores in America, most students noted that the Asian stores were smaller and looked less organized compared to the stores where they usually do their grocery shopping. Some attributed the organizational differences to the size of the store, “too much stuff in the small space.” Other differences they noticed included the products, the smell, lack of aisle labels/signs, boxes and packages of products sitting around the store, languages used on packages, less interactive initiation from the shop associates, crowded shelf and aisle spaces, and handwritten/printed advertisements around the store. Those differences could be understood both positively and/or negatively. For example, the smell of the store could be both an “odd” or “weird” odor and some nice “aromas.” The level of their awareness and the depth of their observations also varied. For example, one student wrote “(t)he greens are in fridges and are not set out. I don’t think this is common with other places” (Matt, presentation). Another student noted the differences in the patterns of product arrangements in his journal.

“The organization of the store preferred to keep the stock organization quite static and stable, and trying to be reliable. However, American stores tend to change stock to get more profit” (Sam, journal). Both observations indicate that the students have moved from the noticing of cultural products to the understanding of cultural practices and perspectives.

Students also compared their trip to the Asian stores with their experience in other ethnic grocery stores, other Asian stores, or stores in China. Three students mentioned Vietnamese, Burmese, Indian, and Japanese stores in their explanation of the similarities and/or differences and these students are of Vietnamese, Burmese, and Indian heritage, respectively. Jordan was born and grew up in Houston, Texas. She is of Indian heritage and goes to Keemat Grocers, a Texas-based Indian grocery chain. She also goes to Nippon Daido, a local Japanese grocery store, because at the current moment, Japanese food is her favorite (Jordan, journal). Unlike most of the students, Jordan didn’t enjoy the bubble tea at the Bánhwich Café because “The milk tea was just milk with no tea and the boba was very cold and not cooked right.” As explained in her journal, she usually buys bubble tea at a teahouse called Kung Fu Tea, where “They mix white and black boba both of which are soaked in sugar water to enhance the taste. The milk tea is strong and sweetened with honey” (Jordan, journal).

Another student, Matt, is from a Myanmar refugee family. His family was first relocated to Chicago, and then moved to Austin, TX, before finally settling down in Omaha, NE. He goes to an Asian market on a daily basis because his mother works at one in Omaha. He recalled seeing sardine cans and noodles and pastes from Thailand and Burma sold in Asian stores, which were his favorite food. While noticing the differences in the way items were placed in different Asian stores (a Burmese store, a Thai store, and a Vietnamese store), he added, “Asian stores are owned by different people of different origin, thus it is safe to say that the way they handle the store is different” (Matt, journal).

There were also students who had never visited an ethnic grocery store and found a lot of things new to them. One student was from Gering, Nebraska, a small city of 8500, of which 0.4% is Asian. She wrote in her journal, “Although we only went a few miles, I was [saw] plenty of new things. There was corn in an airtight bag. They had boxes all over the store and I’ve never seen seaweed in bulk before. Corn is either in a frozen bag or just left out” (Amanda, journal). It is evident that students drew on their previous experience to unpack the meaning of what they saw in the Asian stores. Prior cultural exposure played an important role in their understanding of the products and practices of another culture. Students also learned from their peers. When reflecting on her field trip experience, Emily wrote, “I found that some of the people already went to some of these places, and that others had never been in an Oriental store. I learned more about those people and the fact that I cannot assume that others have experienced similar stuff to me” (Emily, Journal).

Students were able to make connections between what they learned in the classroom with what they saw in the stores. For example, a few students noticed that fish was sold with the head on in the Asian market. One student wrote, “it is a custom to leave the fish’s head on while it is cooked. Furthermore, when the fish is served, the

fish head always points to whoever is paying for the meal, typically the father of the family” (Branden, journal). We also found evidence showing that students were developing a new understanding of the local community, as students wrote, “(t)he trip taught me about the other kinds of subcultures in my own community and ways of living” (Breanna), “(t)hat we have access to other cultures foods that many people aren’t aware of” (Gloria), and “Lincoln is more diverse than what I had previously thought, which is a good thing” (Alexis).

### 6.3 Language Learning and Linguistic Awareness

Given that it was only Day Five of the Chinese program, we did not expect to see a prevalence of Chinese language use in their projects, although we encouraged them to use the language whenever they could, in both writing or speaking, in the hope of addressing the lack of language learning observed by other researchers such as Dubreil (2016) when using LL projects with language students. Although very limited, we found evidence of language use. For example, four students used their Chinese names either in their presentation or field trip report. One group used the conjunction “and”, or 和, to join their names in the presentation (see Table 3). A few students also included basic greeting phrases such as “Hello”, “Bye” and “Thank you” in their presentation. Another student used Pinyin when referring to her teacher in her journal. She wrote, “I learned a lot about what kind of traditional staples are very common. They had different meats and fruits than what you can find in a typical American grocery store. Lín Lǎo Shī showed me a few things that are common in hot pot” (Breanna, journal). What’s worth noticing is that when the students used Pinyin in writing, they oftentimes made sure to add the tone marks, which is an important feature of the Chinese spelling system and supported by iPad input system. Being in a Chinese immersion program might help explain students’ attempts to use language (Fig. 3).

Although students’ language use was still limited, the field trip did provide them an opportunity to link classroom language learning to real life language use. Sayer (2010) talked about his struggle as an EFL teacher to find ways to connect classroom content to real world encounters. Such a struggle is probably shared by all foreign/second language teachers around the world, including Chinese teachers in North America. We were able to make that connection happen by engaging our

**Table 3** Summary of Chinese language use in student presentations

	Pinyin	Characters	Spoken
Student Chinese Names	2	2	
Bye	1 Zài Jiàn		1
Thanks		1 谢谢	
Teacher Lin	1 Lín Lǎo Shī		
And		1 和	



## The Asian Market

郭雨林 和 艾明锐

**Fig. 3** “郭雨林和艾明锐”, Breanna’s and Matt’s names typed in Chinese, joined by “and”

students in an LL project. One student wrote in her reflection, “I learned that the Chinese language is used by many, many people and it was nice to see it outside of the classroom setting” (Delaney, journal). Such a connection is of great value when teaching less commonly taught languages such as Chinese. The fact that language students themselves were able to make that connection is even more valuable; students are more motivated if they find Chinese learning relevant in their daily lives.

When documenting the LL of the Asian markets, especially the language used inside the stores, students used photos featuring labels, packages, and signs in different languages. Six groups used photos displaying 3 or more languages, two groups 2 languages, and two 1 language. No matter how many languages students chose to include in their presentations, they all noticed the multilingual LL of the stores. Some of the students were Japanese anime fans and/or K-pop fans, so they had learned or taught themselves some Japanese and Korean before coming to the Chinese program, which helps to explain the inclusion of a large number of photos featuring Japanese and/or Korean languages. We found in Jordan’s group presentation a photo of a Korean star, who is the leading actor of a K-drama Jordan just watched. What is also worth noticing is that four groups did not include any photos of Chinese language: 2 of them showed Korean only, 1 English & Korean, and 1 English, Korean, and Japanese. This of course reflects the LL of the Asian stores, but this could also mean that it is challenging for novice Chinese learners to distinguish between written Chinese, Korean, and Japanese. In one of the presentations, students misidentified the bamboo mat used to make sushi rolls as some kind of Chinese food. Nevertheless, students’ awareness of non-target languages in the LL and the heterogeneous linguistic reality of the local community should be welcomed; as suggested by Malinowski (2016), multilingual language use in the LL can be seen as an opportunity to possibly bring different language classes together

**Table 4** Summary of languages featured in student presentations

One language	
Korean	2
Two languages	
English & Korean	1
Chinese & Korean	1
Three or more languages	
Chinese, Japanese, English	1
Chinese, Korean, English	1
English, Korean, Japanese	1
Chinese, English, Japanese, Korean, Thai, Vietnamese, & Filipino	3

for more collaboration and larger-scale documentation projects in multilingual communities (Table 4).

## 7 Discussion and Suggestion for Future Research

Based on our findings, we can support pedagogical benefits reported by other researchers using LL in foreign language education. Specifically, we found evidence indicating that classroom learning was being connected to the outside world and promoting analytical thinking (Sayer, 2010) when students documented the Chinese language displayed in the store and compared what they observed in the stores to their own culture. With a focus on culture learning, we were able to create a learning space for our students to move from the noticing of cultural products and practices to the understanding of cultural perspectives. As a result of the Asian market field trip, students discovered aspects of their own local community they had not experienced previously and developed multilingual awareness. In this sense, combining LL with foreign language education has great potential in the promotion of bilingualism/multilingualism (Dressler, 2015).

The Asian market excursion study has significant limitations. The time limitation of this field trip, due in large part to the tight scheduling of the immersion Chinese program, posed challenges in identifying significant changes in participants' language and cultural learning prior to and after the field trip. The data collected from participants, specifically reflections and journal entries, are limited in depth and details. The causes for limited data could be due to the tight schedule, the lack of guidance from teachers, and the lack of preparation of participants. For future studies, we recommend programs lasting at least 4 weeks, which would then allow additional time for participants to reveal and present their learning and for teachers to better understand students' perspectives and thus guide their learning experiences over time. With additional support and guidance from teachers, students can more substantively track their learning and thus provide more detailed data. Individual

and multiple case studies focusing on students' before-, during-, and after- such field experiences and observations could be an effective venue for revealing the changes accompanying their learning. Due to a lack of fully understanding the background knowledge of our students at the time of the grocery field trip, we did not make optimal use of those students who had actually experienced shopping in Asian stores, one of whom had actually visited China. Their prior experiences could have been better integrated as valuable resources during the pre-trip and post-trip discussion. As mentioned earlier, one of the students noticed that some of her peers had prior experience with Asian grocery stores and she learned a lot through interacting with her peers. We can further help our students develop cultural awareness through peer sharing. When analyzing some of the "not-so-great" things about the Asian stores, one student wrote,

Some Americans might think the store as being not good enough, or too messy. What I mean is, some might think that laying boxes around as 'dirty'. Or, there are very few stores that allow a customer to see a drain in the floor, in the center of an aisle as well. What I am saying, the Chinese really care a lot about the product, enough to go there despite these things [Sam, Journal].

Of course, his conclusion might not be persuasive, but his observation can serve as a very good conversation starter and could invite students to think about their own bias when encountering cultural differences. At the same time, as instructors and researchers, we should also not assume that visiting an Asian grocery store is a new experience for all our students. As Matt mentioned in his journal, he was not fond of the store because he goes to Asian markets on a daily basis at home in Omaha and his mother works at an Asian store. Given the fact that some of our students are of Asian heritage, more preparation and better communication regarding the purpose of the project would help these students see this trip as an opportunity to embrace and celebrate their cultural heritage and identity. In this sense, we second Chesnut, Lee, and Schulte's (2013) suggestion of "explicitly engaging with different learners' and instructors' backgrounds, while studying linguistic landscapes to purposefully develop these sensitivities" (p. 117).

Rowland (2012) acknowledged that the analysis aid provided to students, namely a list of questions about how to categorize the signs, might have directed students to focus on particular aspects of public signs, thus possibly limiting their perspectives of the LL. As seen in [Appendix A](#), our questions may have resulted in limiting the students' focus. As Rowland (2012) pointed out, "a different set of questions may have produced different reports and opinions from the class" (p. 502); it could be true in our case as well. Yet, we would still suggest more guidance and modeling to prepare students as researchers, echoing other LL researchers (Chesnut et al., 2013; see chapters by Jiménez-Cañedo "Uncovering Spanish Harlem: Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape Projects in an Advanced Content-Based Spanish Course", Ruvalcaba & Aguilera "A Collaborative Asset Mapping Approach to the Linguistic Landscape: Learning from the Community's Linguistic Capital in an L2 College-Writing Course", and Sekerina & Brooks "Multilingual Linguistic Landscapes of New York City as a Pedagogical Tool in a Psychology Classroom", this volume).

More facilitation/reflection/discussion time would also be helpful to avoid overgeneralization about language and culture. If class time is limited, then we suggest reducing the scope of the task or making the task more specific. For example, with beginning learners, we can ask them to select a language photo and learn the language on the photo, or to pick a culture photo and explain their choice. To some extent, this may limit students' creativity in how they want to present the target language and culture; however, there will be more selection and information processing involved in completing the task, which could be more beneficial to our students. It seems that the dilemma between open-ended inquiry and guided-inquiry will always exist in this type of project.

Last, but not least, for language program administration, it is recommended to invest more resources in educational technology, such as iPads and computers. Technology, which Saville-Troike (2006) defines as the techniques that students adopt in their efforts to learn a new language, can open another door for students to explore both the target language and the target community. By using technology, students can not only practice language skills by utilizing different learning strategies, but also get motivated to further explore what they "really" want to know about the language and culture and thus exercise learner autonomy. As Duff (2012) argues, besides concerted efforts and strategic practice, learning a new language requires opportunities to access linguistic and interactional resources to sustain students' involvement in learning. With the opportunity to learn Chinese through the local community or the LL field trip, combined with the opportunity to explore both Chinese language and culture online through technology, the learners' views of themselves and the targeted language and culture might change based on the responses and feedback they receive, either through real or virtual communication. The available interactional options and resources through either real communication with instructors and the targeted community or virtual communication online tend to exert long-lasting influences on sustaining students' motivation to make continuous progress.

## Appendices

### *Appendix A: Discussion, Research and Reflection Questions*

#### Pre-trip discussion questions

1. In what ways do you think that culture is reflected in the components of everyday life, such as stores?
2. Take a store you are familiar with as an example. Think about how cultural values, attitudes, and beliefs are manifested in the store, especially in such things as the use of space, the language(s) used by people or displayed on signage/package/labels/price tags, the behavior of shoppers and shopkeepers, the availability

and arrangement of products, the variety of specific items, purchasing procedures, and so on.

#### During-trip research questions

1. In what ways is the store organized differently from what you expected?
2. Are food items categorized in a way that makes sense to you? Is it easy for you to find the things you are looking for?
3. Are the food items packaged in a way that seems attractive to you? What differences do you notice in how products are presented?
4. Did you find items that you did not expect? Did you expect to find items that were not available? How do you think the store managers decide what should be offered?
5. Does the store seem to have comparable standards of freshness and quality as those in which you normally shop? Do you think that there might be any cultural reasons for this?
6. From your observation, who does the typical shopper seem to be? Young, old, male, female? Is this what you would expect?
7. Do there seem to be different rules or norms for issues such as politeness, appropriateness, and so forth?
8. To what extent does the store seem to be identified with a certain culture or subculture?
9. What does the type of food and product selection tell you about this culture?
10. Do people seem to interact in the same way as in stores with which you are more familiar?

#### Post-trip journal reflection questions

1. What was your favorite part of the trip? And the least favorite part? Why?
2. Were you comfortable as you observed the store? If not, what do you think might be the source of your discomfort?
3. Compare the store with stores from your own culture, what differences did you notice? Do you think these differences are organizational or cultural? In what ways these differences might reflect cultural values/beliefs/attitudes?
4. What did you learn about Chinese language and/or culture?
5. What else did you learn from the trip, e.g. about your own culture/the city of Lincoln/people living in the community/etc.?

## ***Appendix B: Field Trip Handout***

### **Field Trip Report**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

#### **When you are in the store,**

- Go through the store slowly;
- Pay attention to the following:
  - The use of space
  - The language(s) used by people
  - The language(s) displayed on signage/packages/labels/price tags/etc.
  - The availability of products
  - The arrangement of products
  - The behavior of shoppers and shopkeepers
  - The variety of specific items
  - The purchasing procedures
- Take photos and notes using your iPad (You will need your photos & notes for your presentation and journal);
- Interact with the shoppers and/or shopkeepers if possible, either in English or Chinese 😊

#### **When you are back from the trip,**

- Compare and discuss your notes and photos with your partner;
- Create a presentation about your field trip using any app of your choice;
- Make sure your presentation includes the following:
  - The answers to the two questions you received before the trip
  - Photos you took during the trip
  - Anything you found interesting about the store
- Be creative;
- Do follow-up research for more information;
- Use Chinese whenever you can. *You will have the opportunity to present your project and win more money<sup>3</sup>!!!*

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<sup>3</sup>We give students tokens as rewards for achievement. Students redeem them at the end of the program for souvenirs and gifts from China.

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