

# Global Englishes Orientation, Linguistic Self-Identity Change, and Learning Adaptability among Chinese EFL College Students

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## Abstract

**In this study, a descriptive quantitative method was employed with a total of 459 college students from four selected universities (undergraduate level) and vocational colleges in China participated this research through online survey questionnaire. The findings of this research indicated an overall positive and favorable attitude towards Global Englishes orientation, linguistic self-identity, and learning adaptability among Chinese EFL college students. There is no significant difference in responses to the Global Englishes orientation when grouped according to profile. Sophomores and university undergraduates underwent stronger subtractive change. University undergraduates experienced more self-identity change in self-confidence. In addition, there are highly significant correlations among the three variables.**

## Keywords

**Global Englishes orientation; Linguistic self-identity change; Learning adaptability; Chinese EFL college students.**

## 1. Introduction

The rapid globalization has transformed language, particularly English, from its traditional confines to a global phenomenon known as Global Englishes. This evolution has not only changed linguistic landscapes but also impacted individuals' self-identity and learning adaptability. Therefore, investigating how Chinese EFL college students navigate these changes is crucial.

The study of Global Englishes has emerged as a dynamic and multifaceted field of linguistics. As English spreads and takes root in different linguistic contexts, it undergoes adaptation and assimilation to local cultures and linguistic norms, resulting in various "Englishes" that deviate from the traditional native English standards. This recognition acknowledges the legitimacy of these varied forms of communication, reshaping conventional linguistic hierarchies. With an increasing number of Chinese individuals engaging with English in diverse international contexts, understanding the implications of this linguistic diversification for their linguistic self-identity and learning becomes paramount.

Global Englishes orientation refers to individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and practices concerning the different varieties of English spoken worldwide. It encompasses how individuals perceive their own language proficiency and how they navigate the linguistic diversity that characterizes the contemporary globalized world (Galloway & Rose, 2015). Due to globalization, there is significant growth of the number of English speakers in regions such as China which have no historic ties to English-speaking countries. The foundations of how English is taught and learned has been affected by the fact of English being a global language.

The concept of linguistic self-identity change involves how individuals perceive their changes in English learning from the perspective of linguistic abilities and identities. It is based on reflective opinions of the language they are learning and incorporates the learner's self-concept

as a user of this specific language as well (Rassokha, 2010). This concept is closely linked to the dynamic nature of language and the evolving socio-cultural contexts in which individuals use English (Zhang, 2018). It is indisputable that language and cultural identity issues cannot be avoided in language teaching settings especially due to the processes of globalization of English language education.

Learning adaptability is a vital component impacting the process and outcomes of foreign language learning. Adaptation is the process of self-regulation by an individual in response to changes in the external environment to achieve a balanced and harmonious relationship with it (Xu, 2015). Learning adaptability, refers to the ability of individuals to adjust themselves during the learning process and adapt to the learning environment (He & Zhong, 2006). Learners' strong adaptability facilitates increased learning motivation and improved learning efficiency, while poor adaptability may diminish learning motivation, leading to poor academic performance. Therefore, learning adaptability is an important challenge for students who entered universities and colleges from high schools.

However, a comprehensive exploration of the connections between Global Englishes orientation, linguistic self-identity change, and learning adaptability among Chinese EFL college students is lacking. While research has begun to investigate these interrelationships, there remains a notable gap in the literature. Given China's role in global economics and cultural exchange, it is crucial to explore how these students, situated between tradition and innovation, manage the complexities of Global Englishes, changes in linguistic self-identity, and adaptability in learning English.

Furthermore, existing studies have predominantly focused on the Western context and ESL context, often neglecting the unique cultural, sociopolitical, and educational dynamics present in China. The cultural significance of language in China, deeply embedded in historical and sociocultural contexts, shapes how individuals perceive and engage with English as a foreign language.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Participants

The study was carried out in four universities and vocational colleges in China. The total population is 55,000, consisting of freshmen and sophomores from liberal-arts and science majors. 459 valid questionnaires were collected from freshman and sophomore students in two universities (undergraduate students) and two higher vocational colleges in Shandong Province by random sampling.

Among the total of 459 respondents, there are 144 male respondents and 315 while female respondents. In terms of the year level, there are 293 freshmen students and 166 sophomore students. As for the majors of the participants, 283 students major in liberal arts and 176 students major in science. Regarding the school type, there are 211 university students, and 248 vocational college students.

### 2.2. Instruments

A descriptive quantitative method was employed to investigate the relationships between Global Englishes orientation, linguistic self-identity change, and learning adaptability among Chinese EFL college students. An online questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data for this survey, consisting of four parts: respondents' profiles and three questionnaires regarding the three variables, using a 4-point Likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree). The profile section includes sex, year level, major, and school type.

The second part is the Questionnaire for Global Englishes Orientation, created by Funada et al. (2020) at the University of Oxford. It was used to explore the impact of curriculum content on

attitudes towards Global Englishes, which includes two parameters (global orientation and traditional orientation) with 24 items. Global orientation includes 16 items, indicating an interest in different varieties of English, their speakers, and English-speaking communities. It also includes items that involve beliefs about the importance of being multilingual and participating in multilingual communities. This sub-scale values clear pronunciation over a native-like accent and includes a sense of ownership of English. Traditional orientation includes 8 items, reflecting positive views on learning American and British English as role models and their cultures. It highlights the importance of these varieties and expresses a desire for native-like fluency and accent, as well as being part of monolingual communities.

The third part, the questionnaire on linguistic self-identity change, developed by Gao et al. (2007) at Peking University, evaluates college students' self-identity in English learning. It includes 24 items distributed across six parameters: self-confidence change, additive change, subtractive change, productive change, split change, and zero change. Self-confidence change refers to the change in the perception of one's own competence. Additive change means the coexistence of two languages, behavioral patterns, and values, each used in specific contexts. Subtractive change is the replacement of native language and cultural identity with the target language and cultural identity. Productive change implies the mutual reinforcement between the target language and the native language. Split change refers to the identity conflict arising from the struggle between languages and cultures. Zero change means no change in self-identity. Among the six types of changes, zero change was used as a baseline for comparison with categories of self-identity changes, while self-confidence change was essentially independent of cultural identities. The other four categories represented cultural identity changes.

The fourth part of the questionnaire on learning adaptability was adapted from the research conducted and validated by Xu (2015) on university students' adaptation on English learning as well as a questionnaire constructed and validated by Guo (2021) on foreign language learning adaptability for college students. It includes 21 items across four parameters: adaptation to teaching, learning, environment, and emotional adaptation.

To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot test was conducted on 32 freshmen and sophomores of different majors. The Cronbach alpha coefficients of all sub-scales ranged from 0.849 to 0.996, indicating good reliability of the whole questionnaire.

### **2.3. Ethics and Data Analysis**

This research was approved by the Lyceum of the Philippines University – Batangas Ethics Review Committee. All participants gave their explicit consent to participate in the study voluntarily and could withdraw at any time. All survey data was kept anonymous and secure and processed with strict confidentiality.

The collected data were entered, cleaned and analyzed using SPSS version 20.0. The analysis employed Likert scales to measure student agreement levels. A comprehensive analysis was conducted on the comprehensive average, the highest weighted average and the lowest weighted average respectively. Additionally, frequency distributions, percentages, rankings, and T-tests were also included to provide deeper insights.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### **3.1. Global Englishes Orientation**

The results find that the respondents have generally favorable attitudes towards Global Englishes orientation in terms of global orientation and traditional orientation ( $M=3.19$ ,  $M=3.07$ ). The respondents generally expressed a positive Global Englishes orientation,

indicating a favorable attitude toward embracing linguistic diversity and recognizing the importance of various English varieties.

Regarding global orientation, the top-ranked item was that English programs should offer opportunities to practice with speakers from diverse backgrounds ( $M=3.42$ ). This was followed by the importance of learning about different English varieties ( $M=3.40$ ) and the significance of speaking other languages besides English ( $M=3.36$ ). These results highlight students' interest in various English varieties and multilingualism, aligning with studies by Matsuda (2003a) and Fang and Ren (2018), which emphasize the importance of having personal contact with people from other cultures as well as Chinese undergraduate students' awareness on cultural sensitivity and exposure to different English varieties. In the context of globalization, it is necessary to prepare the students with various English varieties for real-world communication. Besides, Being the native speakers of the world's most spoken language, Chinese students have a strong awareness of their mother tongue and the importance of speaking other languages in addition to English.

In comparison, relatively fewer students attribute the reason for learning English to knowing about English-speaking communities ( $M=2.88$ ) or participating in other cultural groups ( $M=3.01$ ). Additionally, fewer students considered English as one of their languages, suggesting a reduced sense of ownership ( $M=2.95$ ). In predominantly monolingual contexts like China, opportunities to use foreign languages are limited, leading to a lack of emotional attachment. English learning in China is often exam-oriented rather than practical, with most students only seeing its practical applications at a higher academic level, such as research in undergraduate or above levels. Consequently, Chinese students tend to view English through the lens of discrete grammar rules, confining its use to classrooms and exam settings rather than integrating it into personal identity.

In terms of traditional orientation, students highly valued learning about native English-speaking cultures ( $M=3.25$ ) and that good English language instruction focuses on preparing students to use American/British English ( $M=3.23$ ). Similar attitude was found in several previous research (Matsuda, 2003b; Li, 2015; Wu, 2014). However, they were less enthusiastic about using English to live/study/work in an English-only community ( $M=2.66$ ) or regarding achieving a native-like accent as the goal to learn English ( $M=2.94$ ). Research has shown that despite a strong interest and demand for studying abroad (Wen & Chen, 2017), few students choose to stay, work, and live abroad afterward (Li, 2019). Besides, the traditional concept of "standard English" remains influential among Chinese college students, while their cultural identity is more connected to their native language than to English (Wang & Wang, 2004).

In summary, the respondents generally have a positive Global Englishes orientation, appreciating linguistic diversity and the importance of various English varieties. They also value traditional aspects of English, favoring standard norms like American/British English. The overall composite mean of 3.13 indicates a balanced perspective, reflecting a nuanced attitude towards English language use. It accords with the earlier study of Song (2022), which showed a very close mean score between global orientation and traditional orientation. These results are in line with Funada's (2020) findings which showed that the relationship between global and traditional orientations was not so clear-cut.

### 3.2. Self-identity Change

As presented in Table 1, the overall composite means of 2.74 suggested an agreement across all indicators, which means that respondents, on average, experienced changes in their self-identity and the changes tend to be more on the positive side.

Among the six sub-scales, participants ranked zero change highest ( $M=3.11$ ), indicating a strong agreement that their core identity remains unchanged regardless of language use. Self-confidence change followed closely ( $M=3.06$ ), suggesting a positive shift in self-confidence after

engaging in the language learning process. Productive change ranked third ( $M=2.94$ ), reflecting strong agreement on positive cognitive, affective, and aesthetic developments due to language learning. Additive change ranked fourth ( $M=2.68$ ), indicating moderate agreement on Split change ranked next ( $M=2.55$ ), indicates moderate agreement among participants about experiencing identity conflict due to language learning. Subtractive change ranked the lowest ( $M=2.11$ ), suggesting a general disagreement that the respondents' native language and cultural identity are replaced by the target language and culture.

**Table 1.** Summary Table on Linguistic Self-identity Change

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Self-confidence change	3.06	Agree	2
2. Additive Change	2.68	Agree	4
3. Subtractive Change	2.11	Disagree	6
4. Productive Change	2.94	Agree	3
5. Split Change	2.55	Agree	5
6. Zero Change	3.11	Agree	1
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>2.74</b>	<b>Agree</b>	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree.

The results provide an overall view of the multifaceted nature of self-identity changes in the context of language learning experiences of Chinese college students and align with several previous studies (Gao et al., 2007; Gao et al., 2011; Zare-ee and Asgari Matin, 2014; Tong et al., 2017). Among the six sub-scales of self-identity changes, self-confidence change pertains to personal identity change, and zero change serves as a comparison category. The other four categories represent cultural identity changes. The findings show that changes in personal identity had a greater impact on Chinese foreign language learners than cultural identity changes. Gao et al. (2007) attributed this to the instrumental nature of learning in EFL contexts and limited exposure to target cultures, reflecting the distinct characteristics of China's foreign language environment. This environment differs from a second language setting, with less contact with the target culture but significant social and individual benefits from language mastery. Zare-ee and Asgari Matin (2014) supported these findings, identified the limited exposure to foreign language culture and the high importance placed on foreign language mastery as good explanation for this type of change for most learners.

Nevertheless, college students undergo a certain degree of cultural identity change after learning English. The results of productive and additive changes indicate that students maintain their native language and cultural affiliation while acquiring positive changes in behavioral patterns and values. However, cultural conflicts do exist. Although the mean values of subtractive and split changes are lower than the other four categories, suggesting these types of cultural identity changes are not widespread, a small proportion of students still face linguistic, behavioral, and conceptual conflicts due to English learning.

However, the experience of conflict may not necessarily be negative. Split and subtractive changes could be stages in learners' identity transformation (Gao et al., 2007). These changes occur only when there is a certain depth of experience with the target language and culture. Furthermore, with deepening experiences and reflection, learners who initially undergo split or subtractive experiences may evolve towards additive and productive directions. Over time, and with reflection, learners may progress from split or subtractive changes to additive and productive ones.

### 3.3. Learning Adaptability

**Table 2.** Summary Table on Learning Adaptability

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Adaptation to Teaching	3.05	Agree	1
2. Adaptation to Learning	3.02	Agree	3
3. Adaptation to Environment	3.03	Agree	2
4. Emotional Adaptation	2.96	Agree	4
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>3.02</b>	<b>Agree</b>	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree.

Table 2 provides an overview of students' learning adaptability across various sub-scales. The overall composite mean of 3.02 indicates the respondents' generally positive trend towards learning adaptability. Among the four sub-scales, adaptation to teaching is the most preferred (M = 3.05) while the emotional adaptation is the least preferred one (M = 2.96). Adaptation to environment (M = 3.03) and adaptation to learning (M = 3.02) are the next two preferred. It is worth noting that there are only slightly differences between each of the mean scores of these four subscales, especially the top three ones. This signifies a balanced adaptation across various aspects, with room for targeted improvements in emotional adaptation.

The top two indicators, i.e., adaptation to teaching, including teaching mode, teaching content and English teacher, and adaptation to environment are both external or school factors; while adaptation to learning, including learning motivation and autonomy, as well as emotional adaptation belong to internal or personal factor. From this perspective, students' external adaptability appears to be slightly better than their internal adaptability. The results are in agreement with those of Xie (2016), which revealed that compared to individual factors, school factors influence the learning adaptability of college students to a greater extent.

The findings are also consistent with that of Xu (2015) which found that adaptation to teaching ranked top among all the sub-scales of EFL learning adaptability. It was found that most students lack of independent learning skills such as properly monitor their learning process and evaluate learning progress and outcomes and thus most of them are keen for guidance and assistance from the teachers.

Emotional adaptation has been a challenge for college students, as confirmed in the study of Ru (2018). The results suggest a positive attitude toward challenges, reporting that the learners don't get frustrated and want to give up when facing difficulties in learning English, however, expressed slightly lower interest in learning English compared to other emotional indicators. Students lacking interest have low motivation and initiative, resulting in mediocre learning outcomes. Conversely, students with a strong interest in foreign language learning tend to have high motivation, courage to overcome difficulties, and actively seek learning opportunities, leading to better academic performance. (Guo, 2018). In turn, improved performance in learning allows students to experience the joy of success, which is beneficial to emotional adaptation in college English learning.

### 3.4. Difference of Responses on Three Variables When Grouped According to Profile

In terms of the participants' responses on Global Englishes orientation when grouped according to profile, the computed p-values of each subscale were all greater than the alpha level. Therefore, there are no significant differences in responses based on sex, year level, major, or school type regarding global and traditional orientations. However, it's worth noting that in

terms of the school type category, the p-values are close to the significance threshold (Global Orientation:  $p=0.067$ ; Traditional Orientation:  $p=0.075$ ). Although not statistically significant at the conventional 0.05 level, the marginal significance suggests that there might be a subtle tendency for differences associated with school type that could be explored further for a comprehensive understanding.

Regarding to the responses on self-identity change when grouped according to profile, there was significant difference on subtractive change ( $p=0.031$ ) when grouped according to year level; and self-confidence change ( $p=0.007$ ) and subtractive change ( $p=0.000$ ) when grouped according to school type. This means that the sophomores and those from the university imposed greater evaluation than others. These findings are in accord with several previous studies (Bian, 2011; Liu & Gao, 2010; Gao et al., 2015; Liu & Wang, 2018; Tian, 2015).

In terms of the responses on learning adaptability when grouped according to profile, there was significant difference on emotional adaptation when grouped according to year level ( $p = 0.001$ ) and school type ( $p = 0.005$ ). This means that sophomore and those from the university (undergraduate) have better learning adaptability than others. The results confirm the association between learning adaptability and grade level (Wang, 2006). As age and experience increase, students' abilities in various aspects will also enhance, including learning adaptability. The learning adaptability of university undergraduates is significantly better than vocational college student in terms of overall learning adaptation, learning attitude, learning ability, learning methods and learning autonomy (Wang, 2006). This may be related to the relatively lower learning abilities of students in vocational colleges.

### 3.5. Relationship among Three Variables

Table 3 shows the correlations among various dimensions of Global Englishes orientation, self-identity change, and learning adaptability. It was observed that the computed r-values indicates a strong direct correlation and the resulted p-values were less than the alpha level ( $p<0.01$ ). Results show that there were highly significant positive correlations among Global Englishes orientation, self-identity change, and learning adaptability. In other words, the better the Global Englishes orientation, the better is the linguistic self-identity; the better the Global Englishes orientation, the better is the learning adaptability; and the better the assessment on self-identify, the better is the learning adaptability.

## 4. Recommendations

Policymakers may meticulously consider the formulation of educational goals, avoiding prioritizing native speaker language proficiency as the overarching goal for English education in China. Efforts should be made in policy making, textbook development, and examination guidelines to assist students in improving their awareness of Global Englishes and linguistic self-identity and facilitating their adaptability in college English learning; so as to enhance students' English competence in real world contexts such as international communication and cross-cultural interaction.

Curriculum designers may pay more attention to Global Englishes and linguistic self-identity, incorporating English varieties as well as English and Chinese language and cultures into curriculum and syllabus. It aims to improve students' comprehensive understanding of Global Englishes, as well as enhance their positive self-identity change and protect students' L1 identity and core values.

English teachers may integrate supplementary teaching materials into classroom teaching regarding Global Englishes, English and Chinese language and cultures, cross-cultural communication, etc. Guide students to consciously reflect on the relationship between English and Chinese language and cultures.

The colleges may provide better support for students in terms of English learning strategies, learning resources, etc., as well as create a favorable learning environment. Teachers may provide proper guide, advice, and emotional support for students to help them better adapt to college English learning.

**Table 3.** Correlation Matrix of the Relationship among Global Englishes Orientation, Self-identity Change, and Learning Adaptability

	Global Englishes Orientation				Self-identity Change												Learning Adaptability							
	Glo. Ori.		Trad. Ori.		Slf-cnfg. Chg.		Add. Chg.		Sub. Chg.		Prod. Chg.		Splt. Chg.		Zr. Chg.		Adp. Tch		Adp. Lrn		Adp. Envr.		Emo. Adp.	
	r	p	r	p	r	p	r	p	r	p	r	p	r	p	r	p	r	p	r	p	r	p	r	p
Glo Ori	-	-	-	-	.655	.000	.643	.000	.349	.000	.706	.000	.306	.000	.653	.000	.670	.000	.695	.000	.650	.000	.668	.000
Trad Ori	-	-	-	-	.251	.000	.681	.000	.667	.000	.460	.000	.674	.000	.642	.000	.638	.000	.671	.000	.661	.000	.641	.000
Slf-cnfg. Chg	.655	.000	.251	.000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.563	.000	.558	.000	.492	.000	.516	.000
Add. Chg	.643	.000	.681	.000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.657	.000	.714	.000	.647	.000	.712	.000
Sub. Chg	.349	.000	.667	.000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.357	.000	.401	.000	.381	.000	.386	.000
Prod. Chg	.706	.000	.460	.000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.719	.000	.724	.000	.686	.000	.693	.000
Splt. Chg	.306	.000	.674	.000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.275	.000	.309	.000	.331	.000	.301	.000
Zr. Chg	.653	.000	.642	.000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.295	.000	.291	.000	.333	.000	.225	.000
Adp. Tch	.670	.000	.638	.000	.563	.000	.657	.000	.357	.000	.719	.000	.275	.000	.295	.000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Adp. Lrn	.695	.000	.671	.000	.558	.000	.714	.000	.401	.000	.724	.000	.309	.000	.291	.000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Adp. Envr.	.650	.000	.661	.000	.492	.000	.647	.000	.381	.000	.686	.000	.331	.000	.333	.000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Emo. Adp.	.668	.000	.641	.000	.516	.000	.712	.000	.386	.000	.693	.000	.301	.000	.225	.000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.01.

### 5. Conclusion

In this study, the majority of participants are female students, and there is a notable presence of freshmen compared to sophomores. The number of liberal-arts students is slightly higher than that of science students. The respondents were evenly distributed in school type.

In the assessment of Global Englishes orientation, the respondents, on average, hold favorable views towards Global Englishes orientation, with global orientation ranking slightly higher than traditional orientation. The results suggest the respondents' open and balanced perspective towards the diversity of English.

Regarding linguistic self-identity change, the respondents generally express a positive perspective regarding linguistic self-identity change. The most prominent changes for the



respondents are zero change and self-confidence change. It revealed the instrumental nature of learning in EFL contexts, and the lack of target culture experience to some extent. Meanwhile, the respondents underwent some cultural identity changes. While there are cultural identity conflicts, the main tendency is positive and productive.

In terms of English learning adaptability, the respondents held a generally positive attitude towards various learning dimensions. Students adapted themselves better to teaching and environment. Adaptation to learning closely follows, while emotional adaptation is slightly lower. The data implies a favorable view of their English learning adaptability, showcasing a balanced and positive perspective across the surveyed indicators.

There is no significant difference in responses to the Global Englishes orientation when grouped according to sex, year level, major and school type. Sophomores and university undergraduates underwent stronger subtractive change. University undergraduates experienced more self-identity changes in self-confidence. Sophomore and university undergraduates have better learning adaptability than others.

In addition, there are highly significant correlations among the three variables. It indicates that the better the Global Englishes orientation, the better is the linguistic self-identity; the better the Global Englishes orientation, the better is the learning adaptability; and the better the assessment on self-identity, the better is the learning adaptability.

Further research may focus on localizing Global Englishes curriculum designed for Chinese college students and its impact on learners' linguistic self-identity and learning adaptability.

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