



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

System

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/system](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/system)

# Building the digital archive of Hong Kong english learning: Methodology, challenges and reflection



Klaudia Hiu Yen Lee <sup>a,\*</sup>, John G. Patkin <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> City University of Hong Kong, China

<sup>b</sup> The Education University of Hong Kong, China

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 26 July 2016

Received in revised form 18 October 2016

Accepted 24 December 2016

### Keywords:

Narrative

Digital archive

Reading

English language

Learning

Classroom

Popular culture

Film

## ABSTRACT

This article reflects upon the processes and challenges of building a digital archive of English learning narratives, and engages with broader questions surrounding the collection and presentation of student narratives on an online platform. It also discusses the potential uses of the open-access archive in a global context. The archive hosts over 3000 student narratives collected in diverse leisure, educational, professional and cross-cultural settings in Hong Kong. The diverse learning strategies, approaches and challenges that students share thus provide a holistic record of second language learning practices in various contexts, thereby serving as a useful reference for educators, students and independent learners when they develop their own teaching and learning strategies and approaches.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

The recent ‘narrative’ turn in social science has highlighted the role of storytelling in understanding human perception and experience in a wide range of contexts (Barkhuizen, 2013, pp. 1–16; Riessman, 2008; Smith, 2007). The use of narrative inquiry is a particularly useful methodology in the study of second language acquisition, for it helps us to ‘understand phenomena from the perspectives of those who experience them’ (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2013: 2). In this article we will reflect upon the experience and process of adopting narrative inquiry to build the Hong Kong Archive of Language Learning (HALL), an open-access digital archive that hosts over 3000 student narratives on their English learning and reading experiences in various leisure, educational, professional and cross-cultural setting, and consider how we engage broader questions surrounding the collection and presentation of student narratives on a digital platform.<sup>1</sup>

As we shall discuss later, a user-friendly digital archive of students’ learning narratives can help shed light on diverse learning approaches and strategies, thereby providing a useful resource for educators, independent learners and students to develop their teaching and learning approaches both inside and outside the classroom in a global context.

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [hiuylee@cityu.edu.hk](mailto:hiuylee@cityu.edu.hk) (K.H.Y. Lee).

<sup>1</sup> HALL project is led by the Department of English, City University of Hong Kong, in collaboration with the University of Hong Kong and The Education University of Hong Kong. For details of the project, please visit <http://www.narratives.hk>.

### 1.1. Literature review

Language learning narratives are not only individual accounts but they also reflect broader learning experiences by many who attempt to learn a second, or new language in different parts of the world (see, for example, [Candlin, 1989](#)). As critics point out, narrative enquiry encompasses diverse approaches and methodologies, to the extent that [Barkhuizen](#) suggests that the concepts of narrative and narrative inquiry are ‘notoriously hard to define’ ([Barkhuizen, 2013](#), pp. 1–16:2). While including studies that are named as life history, language learning history, language learning experience, language biography, autobiography and autoethnography in his review of narrative inquiry in applied linguistics research, [Benson](#) highlights the essence of all these studies, in that ‘stories of the experience of language learning and teaching are in focus’ ([Benson, 2014](#):156). In other words, the key to all these studies, and one which is also fundamental to our project, is the importance of capturing students’ experience from their own perspective. It is even more so when narrative has emerged as ‘the central means by which people give their lives meaning across time’ ([Pavlenko, 2007](#):164): the act of telling their stories or sharing their experience has become a means through which they can make sense of their learning experience.

When studying autobiographical narratives, [Pavlenko](#) emphasizes the importance of taking into account of context and form when analyzing content ([Pavlenko, 2007](#)). The context is of particular importance in our study, as students’ learning experiences are situated; for example, it is clear that students’ learning activities are different if they carry out the activities within a classroom context, joining an overseas exchange tour, or participating in an after-school reading group. By taking context into consideration, we are able to identify some emergent themes, or some learning strategies or activities that are particularly effective in specific contexts, or learning environments. The importance of context is also highlighted by [Oxford](#), who emphasizes the cognitive and affective aspects of students’ language learning; she explores learners’ ‘situated cognition’, in which ‘learners are embedded in their own learning communities, which can be either nurturing or destructive’ ([Oxford, 1996](#)).

As [Stevick \(1989\)](#) has noted, reading language learning narratives can help students see diversity of learning styles and experiences while reflecting upon those of their own (see also [Barcelos, 2008](#); [Benson & Nunan, 2004](#); [Nunan & Choi, 2010](#)). A language learning histories (LLHs) exchange project between a group of Hong Kong undergraduates and German post-graduates in 2008 developed by [Chik and Breidbach](#), for example, has demonstrated the points of contact between the two groups of students, in terms of their learning strategies (such as learning English through popular culture); at the same time, reading each other’s learning narratives also made them realise that each learning experience was unique ([Chik & Breidbach, 2011](#)). [Murphey, Chen and Chen](#), meanwhile, draw upon the written LLHs by a group of Japanese and Taiwanese first-year university students to highlight the effects of the act of composing one’s LLH on learners’ identity building and the influence of their ‘imagined community’ on their learning processes. They find out that reading peers’ LLHs could help learners ‘compare and contrast their own experiences, identify similar conflicts and successes, and appropriate strategies, beliefs, and attitudes that they see as desirable’. ([Murphey, Chen, & Chen, 2005](#):98). Researchers have also pointed out that teachers reading their students’ LLHs could also gain an insight into their role in students’ learning processes and the effectiveness of their teaching approaches and methods (see, for example, [Oxford, 2001](#)).

The potential of using language learning narratives to highlight diversity of learning approaches is further substantiated by a number of online archives that have been set up to collect and disseminate learning narratives. For instance, [Alice Chik](#) (Macquarie University) managed a database of multimodal language learning histories (LLHs) composed by Hong Kong English majors; [Vera Menezes](#) (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Brazil) hosted a database that includes narratives of learning experience in different contexts ([Menezes, 2008](#)); [Cynthia Selfe](#) and [H. Lewis Ulman](#) (The Ohio State University, US) has set up a digital literacy archive that includes contributions from foreign language and non-English learners.

Building upon the strengths of existing language learning histories and digital archival projects, this project collects diverse learning practices that are situated in various leisure, educational, professional and cross-cultural settings in order to provide a holistic record of students’ learning practices in various situations and contexts.

Narrative, as [De Fina and Georgakopoulou \(2012:1\)](#) suggest, ‘resists straightforward and agreed-upon definitions and conceptualizations’, and most importantly, they highlight the fact that ‘any attempt to present and pull together different strands in the area involves delicate issues of selection and representation’. The ubiquitous nature of narrative and its multifarious forms are well captured by literary theorist [Roland Barthes](#), whose long list of sample narratives range from myth, novella, history, drama to news item and conversation ([Barthes, 1977](#), pp. 79–124:79). In the context of our two-year project that started in October 2015, we do not intend to look out for a specific story form or a structured narrative that is usually intended to chronicle one’s learning experience over a period of time; instead we hope to give respondents the flexibility to recall, and at times, discover, memorable moments of their English learning and reading experiences. As such, rather than using a structured narrative inquiry method, under which respondents are asked a set of fixed interview questions in order to generate coherent, and very often chronological, narratives, our study adopts a semi-structured narrative inquiry that aims to capture some of the most ‘memorable’ experiences that students have had during their course of language learning.

All interviewees of our project received training before conducting the interviews and they were asked to avoid asking leading questions. Yet even so, and as [Barkhuizen](#) points out, ‘conversations or unstructured life history interviews’ normally involve a higher level of discursive collaborations as the stories were often ‘told *with* another’ ([Barkhuizen, 2011](#):398). In other words, the involvement of the interviewees in conversations or interviews means that the narratives produced were often a result of the interaction between the interviewees and the researchers. Such an awareness of the role of interviewees in

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4941367>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4941367>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)