

Using tasks to enhance beginners' orientations for learning Chinese as a foreign language

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Abstract

This study explores learners' orientations, or goals, for learning Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) in a Danish university. Drawing upon empirical data from both pre- and post-course surveys and group interviews, this study examines in what aspects and to what extent these orientations change, and by what these changes are caused, in a university-wide CFL course using task-based teaching and learning (TBTL). The study identifies four orientations. Results indicate that the knowledge orientation plays a vital role in the learning process, while instrumental orientation appears to be the least important to students. Furthermore, the study indicates that all orientations have been enhanced by the end of the course, meaning the learners have developed clearer goals for further study in a TBTL environment. We also show that several external and internal factors, such as the motivating course design (especially the task-based learning method), the learners' increased self-efficacy, and student satisfaction, served to contribute to these positive changes in learners' orientations. It is suggested that a communicative approach (e.g. the TBTL method) can be used to promote positive orientation changes and enhance learner motivation. The study also discusses challenges encountered in helping beginners learn a foreign language via TBTL.

Keywords: orientation; motivation; motivational change; task-based teaching and learning; Chinese as a foreign language

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1. Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that motivation plays a vital role in foreign/second language learning. In the last fifty years, scholars have measured various motivational/ attitudinal variables and discussed the relationship between motivation and factors such as achievement, classroom participation, and persistence at learning (Ushioda, 2001; Alavi & Abbasnia, 2014). One of the variables, orientation (or goal), has received much attention, as the basis of language learning motivation (Noels, Pelletier, Clément, & Vallerand, 2000). Some scholars argue that orientation differs from motivation, as learners might profess a particular orientation without being highly motivated to learn the language in practice (Gardner, 1985). However, other researchers find that some orientations might influence, or even predict learners' motivation (Gardner & Tremblay, 1994; Belmechri & Hummel, 1998). Additionally, the two words, orientation and motivation, are often used interchangeably in many studies. Based on the literature review and our experience, our understanding of orientation is that it does not equal motivation but can reflect or predict it in certain situations, particularly, in a university-wide extracurricular foreign language course. It seems to be a more important variable in terms of reflecting learner motivation when the students choose to learn a language of their own volition rather than as part of their routine degree study.

Many orientation researches have focused on the classification of static orientation, and the relationship between orientation and motivation. (Clément & Kruidenier 1983; Noels et al., 2000). More recently, a 2004 study indicated that learner orientation, among several motivational variables, also changes during the learning process (Gardner, Masgoret, Tennant, & Mihic, 2004). Another recent development, stemming from a global increase in enrollment in Chinese courses at the university level, has been the topic of learner motivation in Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) gaining more attention among educators and researchers (Wen, 1997; Cai & Zhu, 2012).

Concerning what may influence learner motivation, Gardner (2010) claims that learner motivation can be affected by the nature of the course and the curriculum. Task-based teaching and learning (TBTL), the method used in the CFL course on which this study focuses, is a student-centered approach that encourages peer interaction and cooperative learning. Several of its features have been included in various motivational strategies (Dörnyei, 2001). The CFL course at the heart of this study focuses has been offered as a university-wide elective course at Aalborg University, Denmark. In previous studies (Ruan, Duan, & Du, 2014, in press), we found that many students felt motivated to learn Chinese in a TBTL environment. However, there was no concrete evidence directly showing the enhancement of motivation or orientation. Focusing on learner orientation, this study addresses two research questions:

- What are the important orientations of beginner learners for learning Chinese as a foreign language in a university-wide course?
- Is there any significant orientation change after a Chinese course using the TBTL method? If so, in what aspects and to what extent do these orientations change, and what causes the changes in the given context?

2. Literature review

2.1 Motivational orientation

The concept of language motivation was proposed from a social psychological perspective by Gardner and

Lambert (1959). This initial concept of motivation was “the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes toward learning the language” (Gardner, 1985, p. 10). As one variable of motivation, the learner's goal or orientation (the reason for language learning), which may influence the amount of desire and energy expended and is associated with positive affect (Noels, 2001), started to draw the attention of motivation researchers.

Scholars have proposed various orientations for language learning according to different contexts (Gardner & Lambert, 1959; Clément & Kruidenier, 1983; Dörnyei, 1990), several of which are still gaining much attention in the field. Integrative orientation, which is a desire to learn the language to have contact with and perhaps identify with members from the target community, and instrumental orientation, related to the potential pragmatic gains of language learning, such as job advancement or course credit, was proposed by Gardner and Lambert in 1959 in a second language learning situation. For the foreign language situation, Dörnyei (1990) proposes an Integrative Motivational Subsystem consisting of three dimensions: 1) Interest in FL, cultures, and people; 2) Desire to broaden one's view and avoid provincialism; and 3) Desire for new stimuli and challenges. Gardner and Lambert (1972) suggest that the integrative orientation demonstrates greater motivational effort and thus greater achievement in second language learning, while Dörnyei (1990) argues that instrumental orientation contributes significantly to learner motivation in the foreign language context.

Focusing on Chinese language learning, Wen (1997) supplies some reasons for learning Chinese (traveling in China, meeting new people, conversing with Chinese-speaking friends, and acquiring a language that is important in the economic development of the world), and associates them with instrumental orientations, which is different from how we identify certain orientations. Reviewing the literatures, also relating to the given context, this study identifies knowledge, sociocultural, friendship and instrumental orientations. Of the four orientations, three (all except instrumental) can be related to Dörnyei's integrative motivational subsystem.

2.2 Language motivation as a process and research on motivational changes

Many scholars are coming to believe that motivation is a dynamic process, and they claim that motivation may change because of certain forces throughout the learning process (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998; Dörnyei, 2002). This is what Ellis and Larsen-Freeman (2006) describe, arguing, “Motivation is less a trait than fluid play, an ever-changing one that emerges from the processes of interaction of many agents, internal and external, in the ever-changing complex world of the learner” (p. 563). In sum, this view of dynamic motivation is exerting increasing influence on language motivation research, and it has inspired us to investigate the potential changes in learner orientations using this study.

Because of this trend, more and more studies have focused on learners' motivational dynamics in language learning (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; Gardner et al., 2004; Csizér, Kormos, & Sarkadi, 2010; Cai & Zhu, 2012; Kiany, Mahdavy, & Ghafar Samar, 2012; Busse & Walter, 2013; Dörnyei, MacIntyre, & Henry, 2015). It is suggested that motivational changes can be influenced by motivational strategies and instructional setting. Dörnyei (2001) suggests implementing motivational teaching strategies, such as increasing the learners' drive to pursue goals, creating realistic learner beliefs, promoting learners' self-confidence, fostering cooperation among the learners, and increasing learner satisfaction to motivate students. Csizér et al. (2010) argue that aspects of the instructional setting, such as methods of instruction and teachers' general in-class behavior have a strong influence on learners' motivated behavior. Other factors, such as learner self-efficacy and success (or achievement), are also mentioned in various literature (Schunk, 1991; Dörnyei, 1994; Hosseini Fatemi, Pishghadam, & Vahidnia, 2013). In our view, an alternative method, such as task-based teaching and learning, is assumed to influence learner orientation (as motivation) in a positive way in this study.

2.3 Motivating features of a TBTL course design

Task-based teaching and learning (TBTL) is a method derived from the communicative approach. The

method provides rich opportunities for learners to interact with their peers (Ellis, 2003). A few studies have indicated that interactive language tasks may influence learners' motivation (Du & Kirkebæk, 2012; Ruan, Duan, & Du, 2014, in press).

Relating to Chinese teaching and learning, Du and Kirkebæk (2012) suggest that using tasks to organize teaching and learning can motivate learners to engage in a communicative foreign language learning process, especially in a completely new language such as Chinese. Ruan, Duan, and Du (2014, in press) indicate that beginner learners feel motivated to learn Chinese language and culture in a TBTL environment. The learners in the former study pointed out several motivating features of language learning tasks, such as supporting learner autonomy, increasing learner self-efficacy, promoting social interaction and cooperative learning, integrating cultural elements into language tasks, and providing enjoyment, a sense of challenge, and satisfaction. Self-efficacy refers to learners' judgment of their ability to learn the target language in this context and has been shown to influence learner motivation (Dörnyei, 1994). In western cultures, Chinese is often seen as a difficult language to learn. Our previous study has suggested that designing achievable and meaningful language tasks is an effective way to increase learner self-efficacy. The course in this study had implemented tasks similar to those discussed in a previous study (Ruan, Duan, & Du, 2014, in press). Based on the previous study, it is hypothesized that if the level of learners' orientations changes in this study, it may be related to factors such as the use of the tasks, the integration of cultural elements in the tasks, learners' perception of the difficulty of learning Chinese (related to learner self-efficacy), learner satisfaction and course evaluation (including the entire course, and course content and teaching method).

Most researchers in this field use surveys to collect quantitative data (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; Gardner et al., 2004). This is also the dominant method in the motivation research field (Ushioda, 2001), though Csizér et al. (2010) try to gain insights into motivation by conducting qualitative interviews with 15 students, which can be seen as complementary to the long-standing quantitative tradition of motivation research. A longitudinal mixed-methods approach is employed in studies by Cai and Zhu (2012), and Busse and Walter (2013), and this study itself, as the researchers sought to address the time- and context-sensitive nature of motivational attributes. As Larsen-Freeman and Long (1990) have suggested, language acquisition research may benefit from a combination of both approaches.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research context

Chinese language courses at beginner and intermediate levels have been offered as electives by the Faculty of Humanities at Aalborg University (AAU) in Denmark since 2011. New students are enrolled in the course every semester (autumn or spring). This study focuses on the beginner-level courses in autumn 2013 and spring 2014, both of which were taught using a nearly identical course design by the same teacher, who is a native Chinese speaker from the Confucius Institute for Innovation and Learning at AAU and the first author of this paper. The students can gain course credits with 80% attendance, but without any exam. The courses focused on oral proficiency in Chinese, and each consisted of eight teaching units. One unit was presented per week, each lasting 90 minutes and taking place after school (from 16:30-18:15). Since there was no published textbook suitable for such a course, the teacher designed the course content.

Nine language learning tasks were designed for and implemented in the 2013 courses. Six of the eight tasks were also used, with minor revisions, in the 2014 course. This paper presents the data on the six tasks that were used in both 2013 and 2014. All six tasks were designed to develop the learners' speaking and listening skills with the purpose of promoting both learner communication and learner motivation. Considering the learners' basic language level, plenty of planning time and necessary information were provided for each task. Cultural elements were also integrated into each task to develop the learners' cultural awareness and communication

competence. Group work was widely used. The input data for three of the tasks were student-generated, which was expected to promote learner autonomy. Please see the short introduction to each task provided in Appendix A.

3.2 Participants

In this paper, we discuss findings from participants in classes from autumn 2013 (82 participants in three classes) and spring 2014 (47 participants in one class). The participants were mainly from three departments (Engineering 34.1%, Humanities 37.2%, and Social Science 27.9%) at AAU. Most were Danish (79.1%), while others were from other European countries. The gender ratio was fairly equal (55% males). The majority of participants were beginners without prior knowledge or experience of China or the Chinese language. Twenty-four of them, however, had travelled to China or lived in China for some months as exchange students and knew a few random Chinese words before attending the course. Nevertheless, they had not learned the Chinese language in a classroom setting. The course was not related to their own studies.

3.3 Data generation and analysis

An explanatory sequential mixed-method design (Greswell & Clark, 2011), which consisted of surveys and group interviews, was used to generate both quantitative and qualitative data in this study. The design began with the collection and analysis of quantitative data. This first phase was followed up by the subsequent collection and analysis of qualitative data. The qualitative results were expected to help to explain one of the initial quantitative results.

Surveys - A longitudinal, survey-based investigation (consisting of pre- and post-course surveys) was designed and conducted in both the autumn semester of 2013 (September-December) and the spring semester of 2014 (February-June). The surveys were revised according to literature in the field (Dörnyei, 1990, 1994; Wen, 1997) and the advice of three educational researchers. The pre-course surveys were given to students in the first teaching unit (September 2013 and February 2014, respectively) to collect information such as the students' orientations (reasons for learning Chinese), perception of the difficulty of learning Chinese, and other background information. Post-course surveys were given to students at the end of the penultimate teaching unit (November 2013 and April 2014, respectively) to assess the students' orientations for continuing study, feedback on the motivational degree of tasks, perception of the difficulty of learning Chinese, course evaluation, and overall satisfaction.

The software SPSS 22 was used for data analysis. Repeated measures of the general linear model (GLM) were used to analyze the differences between items in the collected data. A paired t-test was used to investigate the changes of motivational orientations between the pre- and post-course surveys. A score of $p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant. Using the data from the post-course survey, the correlations among orientations and several course variables (see the survey sections below) were also examined.

The post-course survey consisted of seven sections, two of which, orientation and learners' perception of the difficulty of learning Chinese, were also included in the pre-course survey. A description of the scales and items from the post-course survey follows.

(1) Orientation, or the reasons for learning Chinese

Ten items (see Appendix B) were adapted from scales used in relevant literature (Dörnyei, 1994; Wen, 1997). The selection of the items was based on previous qualitative data generated by former students who had taken the same course in the autumn semester of 2012 and the spring semester of 2013. This data has not been used in any other study. The students rated the extent to which the proposed reasons corresponded with their reasons for Chinese learning, using a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*Totally disagree*) to 5 (*Totally agree*).

Four orientations were identified in this study: knowledge orientation (two items), sociocultural orientation (three items), friendship orientation (two items), and instrumental orientation (three items). There were two items developed for the present study: “Chinese is an important language”; and “I am interested in/curious about China and its culture”. These were included because many students emphasized these two reasons in previous semesters. Based on Dörnyei’s Integrative Motivational Subsystem, the knowledge, sociocultural, and friendship orientations are seen as integrative orientations in our study.

(2) Task motivating degree

The question “To what degree did the following tasks/activities provided during the course make you feel motivated to learn Chinese?” was in the post-course survey; it was developed to get students’ feedback on each task. Participants were asked to evaluate to what degree the tasks made them feel motivated to learn Chinese on a five-point Likert-type scale (one being *very low* and five being *very high*). Space for comments or suggestions was also provided.

(3) Integration of cultural elements in tasks

To get feedback on the cultural elements integrated into each task, the students were asked to evaluate the motivating degree of the “integrated cultural elements” on the same scale as the second section.

(4) Perception of the difficulty of learning Chinese

Questions about learners’ perceptions of the difficulty of learning Chinese were developed for this study and included in both pre- and post-course survey (in the pre-course survey: “How difficult do you believe learning the Chinese language to be”; in the post-course survey: “After completing the course, how difficult do you think learning Chinese is now”). The students were asked to rate the degree of the difficulty of learning Chinese they assumed and perceived before and after the course, on a five-point Likert-type scale (one being *very difficult* and five being *very easy*).

(5) Satisfaction

Three items were developed for this study and included in the post-course survey to access students’ satisfaction in relation to their own effort and achievement. The first item (“I am satisfied with my effort, work, and performance during the course”) was adapted from a previous study (Dörnyei, 1994). The two items devised to measure satisfaction with achievement levels (e.g., “I have achieved my goals in learning the Chinese language”) were developed for the present study. The students rated the extent to which the statements described their own circumstances, using a scale ranging from 1 (*Totally disagree*) to 5 (*Totally agree*).

(6) Course evaluation

Three items were developed for this study and included in the post-course survey to get students’ feedback on the entire course, the course content, and the teaching method (TBTL). For the entire course, the students were asked to score on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Very unsatisfied*) to 5 (*Very satisfied*). For the content and the method, the students were also asked to score on a similar scale ranging from 1 (*Very low degree*) to 5 (*Very high degree*).

(7) Further enrolment/study

The item “I will continue learning Chinese in the future” used not for analysis but to filter participants. The students rated the extent to which they agreed with the statement, using a scale ranging from 1 (*Totally disagree*) to 5 (*Totally agree*). A score of 4 or 5 showed the participants’ willingness to continue learning Chinese with a clear goal.

Group interviews - Following the collection and analysis of survey data, group interviews were conducted to gain insight into what caused the orientation changes in the given context. In this paper, data from three group interviews (12 participants in total, 6 male) in 2013 and two group interviews (13 participants in total, 6 male) in 2014 were analyzed and discussed. Participation in group interviews was voluntary. In 2013, three group interviews were conducted right after the last teaching unit in each class. In 2014, since there was only one class with a large number of students, two group interviews were conducted separately, one right after the last teaching unit, one the week after completion of the course. The group interviews were semi-structured, focusing on learners' feedback on the course design and the learning experience of the course with regard to factors including their satisfaction, their perception of learning Chinese, and others. The interviews were recorded and immediately transcribed by the first author. Some interviewees were asked for possible corrections or further explanation by email to ensure that the data accurately represented their opinions. The data were coded according to Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) meaning condensation method.

In the data generating process, the survey subjects were asked to write their names on the surveys, which were filled out in the presence of the teacher. The group interviews were also conducted by the teacher. However, the teacher did not have any power to influence the students' course results in the course, and the purpose of the research was clearly explained beforehand. These factors enhance the validity of this research. In the following section, the findings from the surveys and group interviews will be presented and discussed to answer the research questions directing our study. Both quantitative and qualitative findings are expected to be related to the two research questions.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1 Research Question 1: What are the important orientations of beginner learners for learning Chinese as a foreign language in a university-wide course?

This study identified four types of orientations, which were represented by ten designed items in the surveys. The knowledge orientation was ranked as the most important for learning Chinese in the given context, while the instrumental orientation appeared to be the least important. In the surveys, the students were asked to rate the extent to which the proposed reasons corresponded with their own reasons for Chinese learning. The mean of the ratings from three items representing instrumental orientation was calculated as the index for that item, as were the means of the ratings for the knowledge, friendship, and sociocultural orientations. All surveys were valid and participants' scores differed among items. In each table, the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation are shown for every orientation. To facilitate the comparison of each combination of learner orientations before the course, the *p* values of the repeated measures of GLM analysis are shown in Table 1 (N=120), as are the mean, standard deviation, and rank for each orientation.

Table 1

Comparisons among orientations from pre-course survey

Orientation	Rank	Min	Max	M	SD	1	2	3
1 Knowledge	1	1.00	5.00	4.43	0.65			
2 Sociocultural	2	1.33	5.00	4.01	0.64	<0.001		
3 Friendship	3	1.00	5.00	3.86	0.78	<0.001	.013	
4 Instrumental	4	2.00	5.00	3.71	0.52	<0.001	<0.001	.021

Note. Min = minimum, Max = maximum, M = mean, SD = standard deviation. This also applies to Tables 2-3

For the further comparison of each orientation at the end of the course, the P values of the repeated measures of GLM analysis are shown in Table 2 (N=76, only including the participants who wanted to continue learning Chinese). The mean, standard deviation, and rank for each task are presented below. There were no significant differences in scores between the friendship and instrumental orientations.

Table 2*Comparisons among orientations from post-course survey*

Orientation	Rank	Min	Max	M	SD	1	2	3
1 Knowledge	1	3.50	5.00	4.62	0.48			
2 Sociocultural	2	3.00	5.00	4.33	0.52	<0.001		
3 Friendship	3	2.00	5.00	4.16	0.74	<0.001	.017	
4 Instrumental	4	2.75	5.00	4.08	0.48	<0.001	.001	.332

The students rated each orientation according to their individual situations. Our data shows that in the given context, beginner learners may have four orientations for learning Chinese. The knowledge orientation ranked highest (most important) in both pre- and post-course surveys, while the instrumental orientation ranked lowest (least important). That is to say, for the students, the knowledge orientation was the most important reason for learning Chinese, while the instrumental orientation was least important. No significant differences were found among the groups with different genders, nationalities, educational backgrounds, or previous experiences of learning Chinese.

Summarizing the results from both pre-course survey and post-course survey, the integrative orientations (knowledge, sociocultural and friendship orientation) play more important roles than the instrumental orientation. This result may be due to the particular context of this study. In this context, the learners were from multiple educational backgrounds, and the Chinese learning was not compulsory. For their own knowledge development and also based on their personal reasons for learning Chinese (in an elective course), the learners seemed positive toward to the language and culture to a great extent, and thus did not focus only on potential future instrumental gains.

4.2 Research Question 2: Is there any significant orientation change after a Chinese course using the TBTL method? If so, in what aspects and to what extent do these orientations change, and what causes the changes in the given context?

Research question 2 has two sub-questions. The data from qualitative perspectives are only related to the second sub-question.

4.2.1 Is there any significant orientation change after a Chinese course using the TBTL method? If so, in what aspects and to what extent do these orientations change?

To answer this question, we compared the data from both years' pre- and post-course surveys, which were completed by participants who wanted to continue learning Chinese. The P values of the T-test analysis are shown in Table 3 (N=69). The T-tests showed that participants scored sociocultural and instrumental orientations significantly higher after the course than they had before (Sociocultural: $t = -2.01$, $p = 0.048$; Instrumental: $t = -6.07$, $p < 0.001$). Comparisons of other pairs were not significant. However, the means of all the orientations were higher in the post-course surveys than they were in the pre-course surveys.

Table 3*Comparison between orientation scales in pre- and post-course surveys*

Orientation	Pre		Post		Post-Pre	t	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
1 Knowledge	4.54	0.53	4.59	0.49	0.05	-0.83	.410
2 Sociocultural	4.19	0.54	4.32	0.53	0.13	-2.01	.048
3 Friendship	4.04	0.70	4.12	0.73	0.08	-1.02	.310
4 Instrumental	3.79	0.51	4.10	0.48	0.31	-6.07	<0.001

The findings illustrated that generally positive orientation changes occurred in the course, meaning learners' orientations, or goals, were enhanced in the learning process. The enhancement of orientations could be seen as

an expression of the participants finding it more meaningful to study Chinese in connection with their goals, and their goals became even clearer after the trial course. Furthermore, learner motivation was also witnessed to have been somewhat enhanced in this study. As the course continued, the learners showed progressively higher levels of interest in Chinese language and culture. The majority of participants, 78.29%, attended almost every teaching unit. Furthermore, 83.51% participants (76 out of 91 who answered the post-course survey), expressed a willingness to continue learning Chinese, even though Chinese was an extra activity separate from their regular education. The enhancement of learner orientation and motivation both took place during the later period of the course.

4.2.2 What causes the changes in the given context?

Findings from both perspectives are used to answer this question in this section.

From the quantitative perspective, the correlations among the orientations and course variables, including task motivating degree, integration of cultural elements, learner perception of the difficulty of learning Chinese, satisfaction, and course evaluation, had been analyzed with the quantitative data from the post-course surveys, but needed further explanation from the learners' perspective. The correlations are shown in Table 4 (N=76). The mean of the ratings for motivating degree of the six tasks used in both years was calculated as the index for task motivating degree, as were the means of the ratings for integrative orientations, satisfaction and course evaluation. The correlation analysis shows that the five course variables are all significantly correlated to the increased orientations, which has proven our hypothesis on the influence of those course variables.

Table 4

Correlations among orientations and course variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Integrative orientations						
2 Instrumental orientation	.27*					
3 Task motivating degree	.39**	.18				
4 Integration of culture elements in tasks	.30**	.24*	.21			
5 Perception of the difficulty of learning Chinese	.09	.23*	.11	.05		
6 Satisfaction	.45**	.39**	.40**	.17	.12	
7 Course evaluation	.29*	.25*	.39**	.42**	.25*	.39**

Note. * is a correlation significant at the 0.05 level; ** is a correlation significant at the 0.01 level

After analyzing the quantitative data, we found it important to seek insight as to the causes of the orientation changes by employing the qualitative perspective. The group interviews partially validate the survey findings. According to the learners, several internal and external factors might have influenced their learning goals and motivation in the learning process. The frequently mentioned internal factors were the increased self-efficacy and satisfaction, while the external factors were mainly related to the motivating course design, especially the TBTL method.

4.2.2.1 The increased self-efficacy and satisfaction

Self-efficacy is an important internal factor for learners' motivational behavior. Busse and Walter (2013) argue that low initial self-efficacy represents a challenge for beginner learners of languages or other subjects. Oxford and Shearin (1994) claim that many students "feel lost in the language class" (p. 21), because they do not have an initial belief in their self-efficacy. The CFL beginner learners in this study were no exception at the beginning of the course; as a result of their cultural beliefs, they considered learning Chinese difficult. Student 19 explained: "There is a Danish saying — that 'you might have been speaking Chinese,' meaning 'I have no idea what you are saying.' So if you have that expression in our language, (it is) like having a picture of Chinese (as a difficult language to understand)."

However, we witnessed learner self-efficacy increasing during the learning process, mainly due to the

change in the students' perception of the difficulty of Chinese learning. After learning some Chinese in the course, they found the language easier to learn and more logical than they had thought, and thus they believed more in their ability to learn it. Student 11 described: "I think the language is a lot easier now, and I actually think there is a possibility that if I keep learning that, I might someday be able to speak Chinese almost fluently, and I didn't (think so) before." The data from the surveys also support this conclusion. A T-test was used to compare the students' perception of the difficulty of Chinese learning before and after the course (from *very difficult* to *very easy*). The rating after the course ($M=2.80$; $SD=0.81$) was significantly higher (meaning the students thought learning Chinese was much easier than they had assumed) than the rating before the course ($M=1.71$; $SD= 0.73$) ($N=69$; $t= -10.18$; $p <0.001$).

Achievement or perceived progress is also a factor in enhancing learner self-efficacy and motivation (Schunk 1991). Student 11 told a story about how she developed a strong sense of self-efficacy after saying a Chinese sentence successfully: "When I signed up for the course, I thought, oh my god, this is going to be very difficult. (However), after the first class, I could go home and actually say a sentence. I felt that I was motivated to learn more, because I could already say something!" In Busse and Walter's (2013) study, there were declines in learner self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation led by the challenging learning tasks and general curriculum design. In this study, the main reasons for the increased self-efficacy and the change of learners' perception of the difficulty of Chinese learning may be related to the oral proficiency focus, the "meaningful, achievable, and success-engendering language tasks" (Dörnyei, 1994, p. 277), and the absence of an assessment (exam) in the course.

4.2.2.2 Learners' satisfaction with achievement, their own efforts and the entire course.

The perceived achievement was also strongly linked to learner satisfaction. Since it was an elective course with limited teaching hours, the students did not have high expectations, which might be why they were greatly satisfied with what they had learned and achieved, as well as with the course as a whole. Student 25 said: "When I heard that we would have 8 sections, I was a bit afraid that maybe we would learn like one word or two words, because it is not a lot of time. But I think that your use of the time, we learned much more than I expected...it is positive, and surprised me."

The students' satisfaction with their own efforts (regular attendance, active participation, and homework completion) was connected to their satisfaction with achievement and increased self-efficacy. Many students expressed a desire to learn more Chinese or "sign up for the next course" after talking about their satisfaction, which showed that this influenced their continuing motivation to learn Chinese.

The internal factors above were interconnected and worked together to enhance learners' orientation and motivation.

4.2.2.3 The motivating course design: content, integration of cultural elements, and TBTL method

Several motivating features of the TBTL course were emphasized by the students. First, they noted the "relevant", "useful", and "achievable" content, including the topics and the input of the tasks. Second, they highlighted the integration of cultural elements in the tasks as a motivating feature. The students indicated that they were more interested in learning the language when they learned more about the culture. Student 22 said, "I didn't know we would learn about the culture. And I think it was very interesting. That is a very good thing for me to be motivated and learning Chinese." Student 2 also expressed satisfaction with the integrated cultural elements: "in general, I think it was pretty good, because it (the cultural element) was not separated. It was implemented in the tasks. If you can learn the language and some culture at the same time, you win." Supporting this notion, researchers (Dörnyei, 1994; Ho, 1998) also stress in earlier studies that integrating cultural elements into language learning can increase learners' motivation.

Third, the TBTL method was motivating because it allowed the students to interact with each other, enjoy

cooperative work (e.g., group work), and use the language “in a situation”. It has been suggested that meaningful learning mostly takes place through interaction with others in situated activities and participation in communities of practice (Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger, 1998). Furthermore, research has also shown that a cooperative environment may lead to high levels of learner self-efficacy and higher learner motivation (Nichols & Miller, 1994). Busse and Walter (2013) find that a lack of opportunities to communicate is the main source of the decline in students' self-efficacy beliefs and levels of intrinsic motivation. In contrast, this study has provided evidence directly supporting a TBTL course design, and we believe the communicative TBTL method contributed to the positive orientation changes seen therein.

4.2.2.3 Challenges of helping beginners learn a foreign language via task-based teaching and learning

There were several challenges in helping beginners to complete the tasks in this course, such as beginner-learners' low linguistic knowledge and skill, learning originating in the nature of the Chinese language itself, limited institutional support for the course at a curriculum level (being an elective), and the effectiveness of cooperation and interaction in small groups being influenced by group cohesion and member familiarity, all of which have been discussed in our previous study (Ruan, Duan, & Du, 2014, in press). This study found another challenge concerning a debate on the effectiveness of the TBTL method (in comparison with a traditional teacher-centered method).

As a motivating element in the course design, the TBTL method was criticized by one student in the group interviews and a few students from the course. In the group interview, based on past experience, Student 4 insisted that the teacher should be “the primary resource of knowledge” in the classroom, and preferred not to have much peer interaction. Her arguments were challenged by other group members who argued for why they preferred the TBTL method. Student 12 said: “Having to do with tasks or interact, you use the language. I think that is very good, because it makes it easier to remember what you learned in the course... if the teacher just standing right at the blackboard and talking, talking, talking, you, at a point, lose concentration, and after maybe 30 minutes, I don't listen all that much. So by being interactive, I actually follow more in the class.” Student 13 described a problem with “the traditional way of learning” by saying it does not consist of as much cooperative work and variation as does TBTL method. He emphasized “that (the TBTL method) really made me much more interested in going to Chinese class.”

The debate on the TBTL method also suggested that students' learning experiences and styles could influence their perceptions of learning. The students' enjoyment of peer interaction was strongly related to their past learning experiences and styles. In this course, most of the students, especially Danish students, had previously experienced group work or task/project-based learning, and thus they easily adopted the TBTL method. However, in other contexts, students might have experienced different instructional styles, and so they would likely have different learning preferences. Brown (1994) argues that “when learners' learning styles are matched with the instructional styles, their motivation, performance, and attainment will be enhanced” (as cited in Aliakbari & Mahjub, 2010, p. 2). The findings of this study suggest the importance of considering learners' learning experiences, styles, and preferences when designing a language course, especially one for learners with multiple backgrounds.

The students also mentioned some other factors, such as the teacher and the classmates, that had influenced their motivation to learn Chinese.

As discussed above, several internal and external factors may have contributed to the positive orientation changes in this study. For pedagogical implementations, we suggest using a communicative approach (e.g. the TBTL method) in language learning, because it provides learners with rich opportunities to communicate with each other, which may increase learners' self-efficacy and thus enhance their orientations and motivation. Integrating cultural elements into tasks and designing achievable tasks are two motivating strategies for the implementation of the TBTL method, especially at the beginning stage of language learning. However, there are some challenges in helping beginners learn via the TBTL method, such as accounting for, learners' learning

experiences or styles, and needing instructors' attention in various contexts.

5. Conclusion

This small-scale study mainly indicates that the levels of four identified orientations increased after a CFL beginner-level course in a TBTL environment, showing that the learners had clearer goals for their further study. The knowledge orientation played an important role in this university-wide foreign language learning course in a Danish context. According to the students, several internal and external factors, such as the learners' increased self-efficacy, students' overall satisfaction, and the motivating course design, contributed to the positive orientation changes. For pedagogical implementation, it is suggested that a communicative approach (e.g. the TBTL method) can be used to promote positive orientation changes and enhance learner motivation to a certain degree. However, this study also identifies challenges in helping beginners learn a foreign language via TBTL.

Because of the lack of access to other CFL courses in universities in Denmark, it was not possible for us to compare students of Aalborg with other students in different cities. Therefore, it is thoroughly recommended that further research be carried out in this realm. In addition, this study did not include learner self-efficacy or language-use anxiety as variables in the surveys. Future studies may shed light on the influence of these variables. It is also suggested that future studies on orientation or other motivational changes be expanded to include more instructional settings in various contexts.

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Appendix A

The six tasks used in both years

Task	Procedure and setting
1. Creating your own Chinese names	The students work in pairs to create each other's Chinese names with the help of teacher-prepared material. Chinese family name culture is integrated in the task.
2. Connecting word cards into sentences	The students work in groups to connect word cards into sentences. Meanwhile, they listen to the teacher introducing herself using the words on the cards. The students must infer the meaning of the sentences afterwards according to the hints from the teacher. Greeting culture is discussed in the post-task phase.
3. Asking several classmates questions and reporting the results (used in various teaching units)	The students are required to individually survey several classmates and then report the results. Relevant cultural elements are discussed in each task.
4. Teaching your classmates to say the numbers on the poker cards in Chinese	Firstly, the students need to remember how to say the numbers on the poker cards (one or two) they hold in their hands in Chinese. Then they are required to teach classmates around them to say the numbers on their poker cards in Chinese.
5. Role play: ordering food	The students plan and complete the task in small groups. Chinese, Danish, and other countries' cuisine cultures are compared and discussed.
6. Group work: teaching beginners Chinese language and culture	The students work in small groups. They are required to negotiate and plan the task over a certain time span. The students set realistic objectives and study what they want. Some groups choose to focus on cultural learning.

Note. Tasks 2, 3, 5, and 6 are also presented in our previous study focusing on the same course in autumn semester of 2012 and spring semester of 2013 (Ruan, Duan, & Du, 2014, in press).

Appendix B

Presented orientations from both pre- and post-course surveys

Orientation	Items
Knowledge	I want to broaden my outlook and increase my knowledge of the world. I like learning foreign languages and learning about cultures.
Sociocultural	I want to understand Chinese movies, TV, videos, music, etc. I want to learn more about various cultures and people and gain more insight into the world.
Friendship	I am interested in/curious about China and its culture. I would like to meet Chinese-speaking people and converse with them in Chinese.
Instrumental	I would like to make friends with Chinese-speaking people. I may need it for future jobs/studies. It is an easy way to earn study credit (ECTS). I want to go to China to travel, study, work, or live.

