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Exploring the use of tutorial recordings for beginner distance learners of Chinese

Abstract: Previous research into listening to recorded tutorial interaction highlights the potential of tutorial recordings as a scalable resource in online contexts. Dialogue between tutor and learner or between peers may mediate the understanding not just of direct participants, but also of listeners, and listening to interactive recordings may facilitate deep learning. In language learning, both direct and indirect interactions have been shown to contribute to language development. This is relevant for online learning design, especially so in contexts where no tutorials are provided, and students are confronted with a challenging language such as Chinese. This paper reports on a small-scale project which explored potential learning benefits of working with recordings of online tutorials in a non-accredited, self-directed course for beginner learners of Chinese through surveys and stimulated recall interviews. Our analysis of the data shows that viewers focused on different visual and auditory elements of the recordings; they participated vicariously in interactions between a teacher and students, and they reported benefits for language learning and motivation. Findings suggest that these perceived benefits and preferences are linked to linguistic competence in comparison with direct attenders. The study aims to feed into a larger research project including more languages and accredited courses at the next stage.

Keywords: beginners Chinese; online courses; online learning design; recorded tutorials; vicarious learning

1 Introduction

Online beginners' language learning poses challenges to students who have to develop their communication skills in a second language remotely, often without immediate feedback, for example, on their pronunciation, or regular opportunities

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to interact or check their conceptual understanding of what they have learnt. Learners in self-study online beginners' Chinese programmes, in particular, face difficulties that require careful consideration of learning design. They will benefit from opportunities to access different types of input and interaction. Previous research (discussed in Mayes, 2015) which focused on the central role of tutorial dialogue in supporting learning, suggests that tutorial recordings may have substantial potential as a scalable resource in online contexts as interaction between tutor and learner or between peers may mediate the understanding and facilitate deep learning not only in live participants but also in listeners. This is relevant, for example, in the context of the non-accredited and self-directed short online language courses in the Open Centre for Languages and Cultures. These were launched in October 2020 within the Open University's School of Languages and Applied Linguistics, to attract learners with a general interest in language learning or those who study for employment purposes. As these courses must be affordable to learners and financially viable for the School, there are no in-person nor synchronous online tutorials. Although learners on these courses have access to an expert language learning advisor, who provides support via an asynchronous course forum, there is a concern that beginner learners will need the support and interactive practice offered in tutorials, especially when starting a non-European language with very different pronunciation, script and language structure such as Chinese.

This research project explored the potential learning benefits of indirect participation through watching recorded online tutorials for beginner learners of Chinese and is making recommendations regarding the use of tutorial recordings as part of online courses which have no tutorial provision. It is hoped that this small-scale investigation will act as a pilot for a larger research study including more languages at the next stage.

To investigate how learners might work with tutorial recordings in a self-study online course, four synchronous online tutorials with real learners of Chinese were recorded for our study. Recording links were subsequently shared with learners on the Open Centre for Language and Culture's beginners' Chinese courses, and we collected viewing figures through the online tutorial system and conducted online surveys and interviews with participants who had watched the recordings. The study was conducted across two cohorts of the same course (Beginners' Chinese 1). For the October 2020 cohort, we created the recordings and made them accessible to students towards the end of their studies. For the February 2021 cohort, we uploaded recordings at regular intervals for use in specific revision weeks. 16 out of 39 registered learners in the latter cohort accessed at least one recorded tutorial, and some watched all four, while survey responses showed that learners found the recordings useful. To establish in what ways recorded tutorials might facilitate learning for beginner Chinese learners in an online course, we thematically

analysed open survey comments and contributions from five stimulated recall interviews.

In this article, we will discuss research related to learning vicariously from tutorial dialogue and establish how our enquiry set out to extend previous findings before describing our methodology in detail. We will report on our participants' learning behaviours as well as their perceptions of their learning processes when listening to tutorial interactions. While there were some tensions around the perceived usefulness of these interactions, there was an indication that absolute beginners, in particular, were benefitting from witnessing tutor-learner dialogue.

2 Literature review

2.1 Vicarious participation in recorded tutorial dialogue

This study explores the potential benefits of learning vicariously through accessing recorded tutorials for beginner learners of Chinese. In educational contexts, the term 'vicarious learning' has been used to describe situations "where a learning experience is witnessed and reacted to as a learning experience by another learner" (Lee, 2005, p. 1958), and recorded tutorial dialogue as a potential source of such indirect learning experiences has been investigated in different subject areas such as science, engineering and health education (Chi et al., 2001; Lee, 2005, 2010; Mayes, 2015; McKendree et al., 1998; Rabold et al., 2008). Dialogue between a tutor and their students is structured to facilitate learning and can, ideally, be seen as an externalisation of the learning process (Lee, 2005), from which others can also learn. While direct participants in interactions need to use their attentional resources to attend to input and simultaneously select and formulate their own contributions, listeners can focus on tutorial dialogue more fully.

Although there are benefits and drawbacks of indirect as opposed to direct participation, accessing tutorial dialogue vicariously has been shown to facilitate deep learning and may be superior to listening to monologic tutor talk as research points to cognitive, social and emotional benefits from listening to other learners who are at the same level of understanding (discussed in Mayes, 2015). Based on the sociocognitive construct of alignment, Atkinson (2002, 2014) and Lee (2005, 2010) describe the empathic response vicarious learners show toward live attenders. Far from being passive observers, vicarious learners identify and empathize with interactants and are highly active at both a cognitive and affective level. This is pertinent to the current enquiry into distance learners who often lack sufficient personal contact and, as a consequence, may experience feelings of isolation in

contexts where the absence of a tutor and peers may lead to low self-efficacy beliefs and even a sense of failure (Hurd, 2006, 2008; Mills, 2014).

Recorded lectures were, of course, an essential learning tool for students across the Higher Education sector during the recent pandemic, although the practice of lecture capture had started in most institutions in pre-pandemic years and had led to a rapidly emerging body of literature studying the effectiveness of the practice, especially in terms of student attainment (Danielson et al., 2014; Edwards & Clinton, 2019; Leadbeater et al., 2013). Findings are sometimes conflicting, and, overall, inconclusive, and studies of lecture capture tend to lack a critical discussion of the instructivist approach to teaching in higher education. The potential benefits of learning from dialogue as described above, or the concept of vicarious participation, find no mention, and there is insufficient discussion of how to embed recordings into learning design in a strategic and pedagogically meaningful way. This was not helped by the rushed move to 'emergency' online teaching during the pandemic (Baggaley, 2020). By contrast, distance learning institutions are entirely reliant on successful online learning design and more likely to make use of a pedagogically informed combination of different types of tutorial provision.

2.2 Direct and indirect participation in language learning

We must take account, of course, of the ways in which language learning differs from the study of other subjects because the means through which students communicate is also their object of study, and because the development of linguistic competence involves cognitive processes that are distinct from other learning experiences. Interaction is considered vital for language development to occur (Gass, 1997, 2003; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Long, 1996; Mitchell et al., 2013), and both interaction and output continue to be seen as important drivers of language learning (Ellis, 2015; Swain, 2000). At the same time, indirect participation in interaction can also aid learning, and covert learner activity plays an essential part in processing linguistic input. Classroom-based studies of language learning show that listeners draw on the interactive environment around them to develop their linguistic competence (Fernández Dobao, 2016; Ohta, 2001, 2010; Slimani, 1989). Overhearers notice the correct and deviant language used by their peers and, through vicarious participation in the interactions they witness, rehearse language without the immediate pressure of direct social interaction. Listening to interactions can create spaces to repeat, manipulate and internalize language (Fernández Dobao, 2016), processes which are vital to acquiring the constructions needed to communicate in a new language and, potentially more so, in a language such as Chinese, which poses additional difficulties for UK learners.

2.3 Challenges of learning Chinese

It is well-established that learning Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) presents many challenges (Hu, 2010; Kan et al., 2018; Kan & McCormick, 2014; Shen, 2004, 2005). The key challenges include i) pronunciation, especially the tones; ii) the non-alphabetic written script (characters); and iii) the lack of obvious correlation between the sound and the written script. Regarding the pronunciation, there are many similar sounding words in Chinese, which are differentiated in meaning by tones (Lü, 2010). At the same time, there are many words which share exactly the same syllables and tones but mean different things and have different character representations. When it comes to the written script, the sheer number and complexity of characters plus the disconnection with the sounds place a greater cognitive processing load on learners (Grenfell & Harris, 2015). Due to such disconnection, a romanisation system, Pinyin, was developed in the 1950s in China to transliterate Mandarin Chinese sounds (i.e. Putonghua). It has been since used to teach Mandarin Chinese both in and outside China. This means that learners have to learn two systems at the same time, i.e., character form and Pinyin form. Research has shown that pronunciation, especially tones, and character recognition, as well as character production, are the two major hurdles at beginners' level (Hu, 2010; Jongman et al., 2006; Liang & van Heuven, 2007; Xiao, 2010).

Learning Chinese online, especially when the online courses offer no tutorials, adds to the above challenges as learners get no instruction and feedback from a tutor, and no interaction with tutors and fellow learners. It is thus very important for beginner learners to have access to alternative audio and visual materials so that some challenges can be mediated. Although there has been extensive research looking into Chinese language learning strategies (Jongman et al., 2006; Kan et al., 2018; Ke, 1998; Liang & van Heuven, 2007; Lu, 2009; Shen, 2005; Sun & Luo, 2018; Tong & Tsung, 2020; Yin, 2003), there has been no research, as far as we are aware, on the effective use of recorded tutorials.

2.4 Online language learning and use of recorded tutorials at the Open University

Since 2008, language modules at the Open University have been making full use of a virtual learning environment that presents the module website as the hub of the module, gives students access to module resources and online interactivity, and allows students to engage in different ways with their tutor and their peers. In contrast to the newly established short courses, which are the subject of this enquiry,

all undergraduate modules include tutor support in the form of asynchronous forum moderation as well as in-person and synchronous online group tuition. This model of supported online learning offers excellent learning opportunities but also comes with challenges, for example in terms of motivation (Hurd, 2006), fostering online participation (Hampel & Pleines, 2013), and learner anxiety in synchronous online interaction (Bárkányi, 2018; de los Arcos et al., 2009). Negotiating the affordances of the virtual learning environment itself poses another layer of challenges, i.e., 'the particular challenges of innovation' (White, 2014, p. 548), which all distance learners have to deal with. Stickler (2022, p. 22) points out that 'technology does influence what happens in a language classroom, and not always in the way the teacher intends or realises'. For example, internet issues and bad sound quality can affect live tutorials and, also, their recordings.

The recording of synchronous online tutorials at the Open University's School of Languages and Applied Linguistics follows a strict protocol, which allows students to attend tutorials that are not recorded if they prefer, while also recording some of the scheduled live tutorials and making them available to listen to in retrospect. Students are strongly advised to attend the synchronous online sessions, but attendance is not compulsory, and students can choose amongst live participation, watching recordings, or a combination of both. Usually, students who make use of recordings also attend live events. In a previous study, students of French, German and Spanish at intermediate and advanced levels who accessed recorded tutorials, reported benefits of tutorial recordings in terms of engaging with different voices and perspectives and emphasize that, unlike live tutorials which make heavy demands on participants' processing capacities, recordings provide opportunities for reflection and consolidation (Pleines, 2020a, 2020b). In some cases, they also helped reduce feelings of isolation.

2.5 Research questions

Previous research into vicarious learning processes in language learning was conducted in contexts where students were able to engage both directly and indirectly, allowing them to support their learning by combining live and vicarious participation in tutorials, either in-person or online. By contrast, the current study explores a self-study online learning environment where tutorial interactions were accessed exclusively through recordings. The enquiry further extends previous research at the Open University (Pleines, 2020a, 2020b) by working with *beginner* learners and, notably, beginner learners who are studying a non-European

language with a challenging script and pronunciation. Our work is based on a socio-cognitive perspective (Atkinson, 2002, 2014; Batstone, 2010), suited to the underlying sociocognitive concept of vicarious learning, which combines the intrapersonal and the interpersonal and, by definition, involves the cognitive processing of a social event.

With these considerations in mind, the present study seeks to address the following overarching research question: In what ways do recorded tutorials facilitate learning for beginner Chinese learners in an online course?

We will focus on three aspects:
1) What use do learners make of the resource?
2) What elements do they focus on?
3) What perceived benefits, if any, do they report?

By exploring these aspects, the study aims to establish how tutorial recordings could be used in future learning design for online language learning.

3 Methods

3.1 Research context

As stated in the Introduction, in October 2020, the Open University launched the Open Centre for Languages and Cultures to offer non-accredited short online courses. Mandarin Chinese was one of the five languages on offer. Three courses are offered in each language at beginner level (e.g., Beginners' Chinese 1, Beginners' Chinese 2 and Beginners' Chinese 3). Completion of all three courses takes learners to an exit level of A1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Each course is 16-week long, consisting of 4 hours of study per week. At the time of this study, each course had three cohorts per year with course starting dates in October, February and June. The data in our study comes mainly from two cohorts of the Beginners' Chinese 1 course: the October 2020 cohort (coded BC1Oct20) and the February 21 cohort (coded BC1Feb21).

3.1.1 Structure and content of Beginners' Chinese 1

The course is divided into 16 weeks with four revision weeks in weeks 4, 8, 12 and 16. Each of the 12 study weeks includes i) scaffolded teaching of the essentials in reading, writing, speaking and listening in Chinese through a variety of online interactive activities; ii) a quiz section with ten questions to test learners' understanding; and iii)
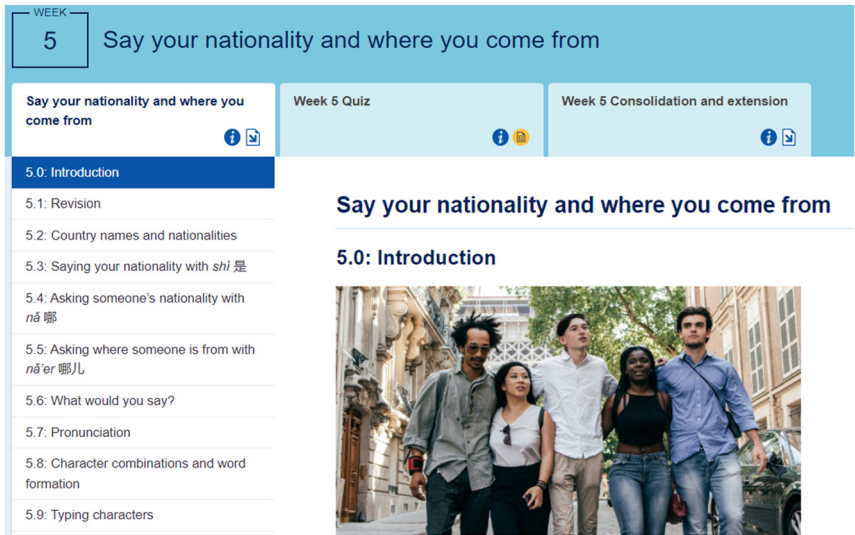
Figure 1: Screengrab of Beginners' Chinese 1 course website.

a consolidation section with cultural information (see Figure 1 above). Some interactive activities are linked to dedicated discussion threads via a course forum for learners to share their answers and reflections. The focus is on independent study, but learners are supported by a specialist learning adviser, with extensive teaching experience in distance education, via the course forum.

3.1.2 Beginners' Chinese 1 learner profile

For the BC1Oct20 cohort, there were 31 registered learners; and for the BC1Feb21 cohort, there were 39. Although these courses are open to a global audience, learners of these two cohorts were UK-based.

Table 1 shows the Beginners' Chinese 1 learner profile captured on our computer system during registration. Although about 50 % are above the age of 50, in comparison with other European languages, Chinese has attracted more younger learners who may take the course for career progression. As the focus of our study is not on how recorded tutorials support learners with different profiles, we did not collect personal information from learners who took part in our project. We hope this general learner profile will provide a picture of learners who registered on Beginners Chinese 1, which formed the context of our study.

Table 1: Beginners' Chinese 1 learner profile.

Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Education
Male 38.79 %	Under 17 6.32 %	Asian 2.72 %	1 A Level[a] 8.45 %
Female 61.29 %	18–24 4.88 %	Mixed 6.1 %	2 A Levels 7.52 %
	25–29 2.63 %	White 91.18 %	Higher education 51.24 %
	30–39 10.83 %		Postgraduate 18.9 %
	40–49 7.89 %		Fewer than 2 A Levels 5 %
	50–59 6.31 %		Unknown 5 %
	60–64 29.89 %		
	65+ 14.29 %		

[a]"A Levels" are a public examination taken at the end of secondary education (normally at aged 18) used as part of university admissions.

3.2 Pre-project preparation

Between November and December 2020, the research project materials were prepared in the following way:

– As Beginners' Chinese 1 offers no tutorials, the two researchers (i.e. authors of this paper) designed four tutorials and later recorded with real learners. **Tutorial 1**'s topic is *Greetings and introductions* (covering content from weeks 1–5); **Tutorial 2** is *Describing where you work and live*; (weeks 6–9); **Tutorial 3** is *Dates including birthdays* (weeks 10–13); and **Tutorial 4** is *Family and friends* (weeks 14 and 15). Each tutorial includes explanations by the tutor as well as opportunities for students to practice their language skills and interact with the tutor, and with each other via audio and text chat. Gap fill and matching activities, which required students to use the drawing tools on an interactive whiteboard, were also included.

– A project information sheet was sent to all Beginners' Chinese 1 learners of the BC1Oct20 cohort and also to staff members, who were learners of Chinese, to recruit learners to attend the planned four synchronous online tutorials and agree to have them recorded.

– A consent form was sent to seven students and two staff members who were willing to take part. Six of them signed the consent form, and five participated in at least one of the online synchronous tutorials.

One of two researchers delivered and recorded four 40-min tutorials with the volunteer learners. Ideally, the first two recordings should have been produced in November and early December 2020 so that they could be offered at the right points to BC1Oct20 learners to coincide with Weeks 5 and 9 of their study calendars when

these topics had been covered. However, due to logistic complications, they were delayed, and the tutorials were delivered and recorded in January and February 2021 using Adobe Connect, an online tutorial system. The recordings of the tutorials captured all visual and auditory input and interaction that occurred during the sessions including tutor and student voice, PowerPoint slides, whiteboard activities and text chat. Although the timing was not in sync with the study calendar for the BC1Oct20 cohort, all four recordings with presentation slides were shared with learners as revision materials (the first two in early February and the other two in mid-February) and learners were invited to give feedback via the course forum. As for the BC1Feb21 cohort, the recordings and tutorial slides were made available to learners at the right intervals (Week 5 for **Tutorial 1**; Week 9 for **Tutorial 2**; Week 13 for **Tutorial 3**; and Week 15 for **Tutorial 4**) to be in line with the study calendar. Messages were sent to all BC1Feb21 learners informing them of the recordings with a survey link for them to provide feedback. The same message was posted by the learning advisor on the course forum.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

Given that learner agency, intentionality and an awareness of learning (Vitanova et al., 2015) are at the core of vicarious learning processes, it is relevant to explore learner behaviour, intentions and perceptions. In this study we used semi-structured interviews with a stimulated recall element as our main research instrument, and findings were additionally informed by user analytics and results from online surveys and open comments. While the user analytic and survey data provide insights into how learners used the resources, the interviews explore learner behaviour and perception in more depth, with the different parts of the interviews contributing in different ways. The initial sections of each interview were retrospective and allowed learners to reflect on their previous study of Chinese as well as their recent experience with recorded tutorials. The later sections used an introspective stimulated recall methodology by playing back selected sequences from the recordings and thereby aiding participants in "mentally reengaging with the original event" (Gass & Mackey, 2017, p. 14), which helped to uncover some of the cognitive processes involved in listening to tutorial interactions.

The following data sets that were collected between November 2020 and June 2021 informed our findings:
– Usage of recorded tutorials (data captured by user analytics in the online tutorial system, Adobe Connect)
– Online surveys
– Stimulated recall interviews

Table 2: Recorded tutorial viewing numbers.

	Tutorial 1	Tutorial 2	Tutorial 3	Tutorial 4	Total viewing
BC1Oct20 cohort	5	1	2	2	10
BC1Feb21 cohort	15	8	8	4	35
Students from other Chinese modules (Beginners' 2 & 3)	2	2	5	2	11

3.3.1 Usage of recorded tutorials

Table 2 above shows the number of learners who viewed each recording for both cohorts. Amongst the BC1Oct20 learners, one viewed all four recordings; in the BC1Feb21 cohort, three learners viewed all four recordings, and one viewed three recordings.

A few learners from Beginners' Chinese 2 and 3 also viewed the recordings as these were made available to them as additional resources. These learners did not take part in the surveys, but the interview participants included one learner who started Beginners' Chinese 1 in October 2020 and then progressed to Beginners' Chinese 2 in February 2021.

3.3.2 Online surveys

We encouraged learners of our BC1Feb21 cohort to complete a very brief Microsoft Forms questionnaire after watching each tutorial. The intention was to increase engagement with the survey by making minimal demands on respondents' time and to obtain responses that reflected learners' immediate reactions.

The survey for Recorded tutorial 1 asks those who viewed it to rate the usefulness of the recording on a five-point scale, briefly explain why they chose a particular answer (open comment question), and to report the approximate time spent on watching the recording.

Surveys for Recorded tutorials 2, 3 and 4 added the following optional question:

> If you are happy to contribute further by taking part in an informal individual interview (in English), please, enter your name and email below. We will then send you more information and a separate consent form and agree a suitable date and time when we can speak to you.

We received a total of 22 responses from at least 8 different learners, of which 7 chose "very useful", 12 "useful" and 3 "somewhat useful". The first tutorial suffered from

Table 3: Timings and usefulness ratings.

Tutorials and timings			Usefulness ratings				
Tutorial	Length of recording	Mean time watching (minimum–maximum)	Very useful	Useful	Somewhat useful	Not so useful	Not at all useful
1	50 min	52 min (45–60)	2	3	2		
2	70 min	71 min (45–120)	2	5	1		
3	60 min	70 min (60–90)	2	2			
4	60 min	67 min (60–70)	1	2			
Total			7	12	3	0	0

some audio issues which is reflected in the figures. These numbers are, of course, too small to draw conclusions but they give an indication of how viewers rated their experience. Table 3 above shows the length of each recording, average viewing by learners as well as how useful they found each recording.

The open comments, which we will report on in Section 4.1, give insights into what learners had found useful or not so useful, and why.

3.3.3 Stimulated recall interviews

Of those BC1Feb21 learners who responded to the surveys, five volunteered to take part in stimulated recall interviews. The aim was to explore further how they used the recordings and what elements were salient to them. Below we explain how we prepared for the interviews and designed the interview guide, followed by a description of interview participants.

3.3.3.1 Selection of extracts for stimulated recall

A project team member watched each tutorial recording before the interview to identify extracts which could be replayed during the interview before questions were asked. These extracts were chosen because they involve the explanation of language points which may be best explained in a tutorial by a tutor and because they also include tutor-student or student-student interaction. For example, the following two extracts were identified in Tutorial 3:

Extract 1   00:38:20–00:43:40 Talking about the date of your birthday
             Teacher explains how to talk about birthdays as there are differences
             between Chinese and English, and students practise talking about their
             birthday

Extract 2   00:48:00–00:51:00 Matching character sentences with their Pinyin
                 sentences
                 Teacher reads sentences, and students link the Pinyin sentences with
                 the character sentences and translate them into English.

3.3.3.2 Design of interview guide

A semi-structured interview guide was formulated by the project team around the following areas (see Appendix I for the full guide): i) background information about learning Chinese (e.g. how long participants had studied Chinese, the challenges, if they had studied online before, if they enjoyed the course so far); ii) how they make use of the recorded tutorials (e.g. how many tutorials they had watched and for how long); and iii) elements participants focussed on, and iv) perceived benefits (if any). The stimulated recall phase of the interview consisted of participants watching the two extracts in turn and responding to questions immediately after watching each extract. The interviewer elicited information on what they remembered doing when watching for the first time (e.g. taking notes/imitating pronunciation) and what they noticed (e.g. visual/audio/tutor feedback/language constructions/errors).

3.3.3.3 Interviewee profile

Each recall interview lasted between 30 and 40 min and was recorded and later transcribed. Table 4 gives details of interviewees' pseudonyms, the number of tutorials they had watched and their level of Chinese.

   Although only two learners describe themselves as absolute beginners, the others also chose to start again from the beginning. Their previous study had

Table 4: Interviewee details.

Interviewee pseudonym	Number of recorded tutorials watched	Previous study of Chinese
Alice	All four recorded tutorials	Had studied Chinese on and off for three years
Amy	One recorded tutorial (Tutorial 2)	Had studied Chinese on and off for three years
Emily	All four recorded tutorials	Absolute beginner
Janet	Three recorded tutorials (1, 2 and 3)	Absolute beginner
Sophie	All four recorded tutorials	Studied Chinese on and off for many years but Beginners' Chinese 1 in October 2020 was the first structured course; had progressed on to Beginners' Chinese 2 in February 2021 by the time of the interview

stretched over several years but had always been part-time and not necessarily continuous, which means that these learners, too, were still at a basic level of linguistic competence in Chinese.

4 Results

As is evident from the contextual information provided above, this exploratory enquiry is very small. However, bringing together open survey comments and interview transcripts provided rich qualitative data, which we analysed thematically and are reporting on below.

We will first discuss participants' responses under the following headings, which relate to our interview questions:
– Usefulness of the resources
– Listening to the teacher versus listening to other learners
– Features participants focussed on
– Content/activities learners wished to have more of
– Challenges

We will then report in detail on the thematic aspects that were brought out by participants related to the perceived benefits of listening to tutorial interaction.

4.1 Usefulness

Generally, participants found the recordings useful and enjoyable, and there are several mentions that the recordings were a good revision resource, which is how they were intended and used in BC1Feb21 where students were alerted to each tutorial in the relevant revision week. Some participants compared the experience of listening to recorded tutorials with direct interaction, either in terms of rating recordings "second best", i.e. direct interaction would have been better but the recordings were also useful, or by referring to the experience of interacting vicariously which the recordings afforded them.

> *I watched all of them. Very useful, very easy to access…* [Alice, interview]

> *I was very happy and I really enjoyed watching them.* [Emily, interview]

> *Useful as a revision but would have preferred to interact rather than watch, especially opportunities to speak Chinese with real people.* [Survey]

Very useful for further support and revision. [Survey]

Useful revision. Good to take information in through listening to explanations and hear correct pronunciation. It felt interactive even though we aren't taking part. [Survey]

I have found it extremely useful as it felt as if I was actually participating to a 'live' lesson. [Survey]

4.2 Listening to the teacher versus listening to other learners

In the interviews, we explored the respective parts that the teacher and other learners played in the experience of accessing recordings. All participants found it helpful to listen to the teacher, but perceptions differed as to whether only the teacher was seen to be supporting the learning process, or the other learners were of value, or even essential, too. As an absolute beginner, Emily had a clear preference for recorded tutorials with students. When asked to choose between a teacher-only presentation and a tutorial with students and teacher she responded without hesitation *"both students and teacher"*, because *"when the students were practising, I was trying too"*. Janet expressed the same sentiment: *"I find the listening really tuning in. And I was even listening to other people speak."* By contrast, Alice, who had studied Chinese before, had a higher level of competence in the language than most of the learners in the recorded session, and, consequently, *"didn't find students doing things useful."* To her, the contributions by other learners were even *"distracting from what is being learned."* The negative perception of other learners was, however, not supported by Amy, who, like Alice, had three years previous study of Chinese. Amy is herself a teacher and would have liked the tutorials to be more interactive with more conversations also between students and not just student and teacher: *"Sometimes it's good to have the pupils talking to each other […]. It makes it more like a real conversation."*

4.3 Features participants focused on

We asked participants what they remembered from the tutorials they had watched, and the stimulated recall phase of the interview allowed further, more detailed, insights into what they were focussing on when watching the sessions. "When I listened to the teacher I completely focused" said Sophie, and teacher talk was an important element which all participants referred to. They also focused on specific slides with language explanations or phrases, which they might replay, or take screenshots of.

Participants sometimes noticed errors in learner contributions and took note of any corrective feedback the teacher provided. They also focused on specific structures they were learning or had previously found difficult. They noticed the text chat especially where it was part of an activity, for example when the students in the tutorial were asked to put their answers in the chat. In terms of the writing, they focused on either Pinyin or Chinese characters depending on their level of understanding of these writing systems, for example, Emily and Sophie always read the Pinyin, but Amy went back to check the Chinese characters. Pronunciation was a strong focus for all participants as the tutorial allowed them to look at the written language on the slides while listening to the pronunciation.

> *The teacher sometimes **repeated**, it was very helpful.* (our emphasis) [Emily, interview]

> *I really like the fact that the teacher **pronounced** the words.* (our emphasis) [Emily, interview]

> I copied the Pinyin. [Sophie, interview]

We will refer to some of these features again when analysing the perceived benefits of recorded tutorials in Section 4.6.

4.4 What content/activities participants wished to have more of

Some of the features participants focused on were also mentioned when we asked the question of what they would have liked more. This applies for example, to the Chinese script and the teacher illustrating how to write characters.

> *I just wish there were more writing exercises* [Emily, interview]

Several learners also referred to wanting more interactivity either in speech or in writing, for example, in the context of asking and answering questions using Chinese characters and Pinyin. Above, we already referred to Amy's view as a teacher that more interactivity in the live sessions would also benefit listeners. Sophie, too, refers to a teaching sequence where a language point is explained and illustrated but not practised by the students.

> *It was a pity that the tutor didn't get the students to practise using it. It was a bit passive, just looking at the slide.* [Sophie, Interview]

Interestingly, one survey respondent suggested that the recordings could be enhanced by providing more online interactivity also for listeners. This is worth

exploring in future given that online tutorial rooms are being developed to offer more interactivity also to retrospective viewers.

> *It would be good to be able to use the marker pens and do the activities like the live participants. It feels like you are using your Chinese for real because you are put on the spot if you join in.* [Survey]

Two respondents voiced their preference for live attendance over being offered a recording. One of them, Sophie, however, makes a case for recordings as the option that is second best.

> *So that in addition to what we do in our own time, having to participate and do this live would be best to activate the language. You have to use the language in the limited time span when someone's asked you a question and you have to answer it there and then. The 2nd best is what we are doing now: I am just looking at it passively because I'm not having to participate because I'm not a participant. But it's good for me to review it and because of the format you see it through the eyes of a participant. So it made me more aware of my weaknesses.* [Sophie, Interview]

It is clear from Sophie's comment that indirect participation in recorded tutorials, although not as beneficial for her as attending live because she had been learning Chinese for some years, does bring benefits of consolidating knowledge and realising what she needed to work on. This echoes previous research findings that recordings provide opportunities for reflection and consolidation (Pleines, 2020a, 2020b).

One interview participant, Emily, responded that she wanted more recorded tutorials. She would also be happy with longer recordings, but others, like Amy, felt their concentration was waning towards the end of the one-hour recorded session.

4.5 Challenges

The recordings were easy to access but the main challenge when recording the tutorials and when listening afterwards was associated with audio quality. Tutorial 1, in particular, was badly affected by echo, and the teacher had to spend time sorting out students' audio issues while the recording was ongoing, which was annoying for listeners. This may have had a negative impact on the project overall and put some students off wanting to watch subsequent recordings. There were a number of comments on this issue.

> *The echo made this very difficult to follow.* [Survey]

> *It was helpful […], unfortunately, is was marred by the echo.* [Survey]

Where learners discussed challenges related to learning Chinese, recordings were seen as helpful in that they provided choices to suit different needs (e.g. Pinyin or

Chinese script; listening once or repeatedly). However, learners missed the opportunity for direct feedback, which a tutor could have provided in a live session.

4.6 Perceived benefits

The final aspect we explored in our study relates to learners' perceived benefits in using tutorial recordings. A close reading of our data brought out aspects which learners mentioned repeatedly and which point to ways in which the recordings may have benefited their learning.

These include:
– using imagination and participating vicariously
– opportunities to replay and pause the recording
– learning and consolidating words and phrases
– reinforcing character learning and pronunciation
– understanding language points learners had struggled with previously
– noticing
– building confidence
– experiencing 'real interaction'
– feeling connected to other students

Below, we will elaborate on each point.

4.6.1 Using imagination and participating vicariously

Although students knew they were watching a recording of an event that occurred in the past, they imagined that they were there with the tutor and other learners and were participating vicariously in the interactions.

> *I was trying to imagine me answering that question.* [Emily, interview]

> *I answered the questions in my head, not out loud.* [Alice, interview]

> *I was trying to take an active role even though I wasn't actually there.* [Janet, interview]

4.6.2 Replaying and pausing

We saw from the user data that viewers who responded to the survey generally viewed the full tutorial not just chunks of it. In the interviews, learners gave more detail about how they controlled the pace at which they listened to the interactions,

for example by pausing the recording and replaying specific passages from which they could learn, or to take notes.

> *The advantage of watching a recording is you can pause it and do the activity [...] I could pause, I could go through it in my head if I needed to. Generally I tried to keep pace with [the other students]* [Sophie, interview]

> *I replayed because I wanted to hear the part where the student was wrong.* [Emily, interview]

> *Sometimes I had to pause and then go back again…. I was pausing and writing notes …* [Emily, interview]

4.6.3 Learning and consolidating words and phrases

As memorising the Chinese expressions presents difficulties for learners, the recording offered opportunities for consolidation as well as extending existing knowledge. In the interviews, Emily commented that she noted new words which were not in the course materials. Other participants and survey respondents focused on the phrases which they already knew from the course and found it helpful to deepen their learning with additional explanations in the tutorial. They also enjoyed new information that was given.

> *It helped to hear the words and explanations.* [Survey]

> *Activities offer lots of useful ways of practising the language points, e.g. dates. Clear explanations and enjoy background info/stories about the characters.* [Survey]

> *I think it was good revision because you got someone giving you an explanation verbally, somehow it makes a change from reading it. It is a different way of taking information in. It helps you remember it more.* [Sophie, interview]

> *It's reinforcing something I know but forget. You need to be reminded constantly.* [Amy, interview]

4.6.4 Reinforcing character learning and pronunciation

These are the two aspects of learning Chinese which participants talked about most often. While they are, of course, two separate skills, it is also the combination of seeing the writing and hearing the phrases spoken that was helpful to learners.

> *I found, after I watched the tutorials, I recognised them [the characters] more.* [Alice, interview]

It was a revision and also I really like the fact that the teacher pronounced the words. [Emily, interview]

The tutorials gave me the chance to revise and to hear again and then to practise the tones and how to pronounce some words. [Survey]

I seem to understand the hanzi better after seeing it used. [Survey]

4.6.5 Understanding language points learners had struggled with previously

The explanations provided by the teacher and supported by visuals were helpful for understanding aspects which learners had found challenging in an online self-study course. Participants focused on language points they had not fully understood previously, for example, Janet, who hadn't learnt Chinese before, found that the recorded tutorials helped her understand something she had struggled with on her own:

I watched the tutorial and then I think it came up again in another week, I understood it. [Janet, interview]

I understood much more after watching it. [Survey]

4.6.6 Noticing

Whilst working with the recording, participants also felt that they are observers who can step back from direct engagement. As they were not under pressure to perform themselves or worried about being called to answer questions, they noticed more language including mistakes made by other learners in the recording, which gave them a sense of achievement as evidenced below:

*I realised that he made a mistake **straight away**… (our emphasis)* [Emily, interview]

Noticing is also a driver of language learning (Ellis, 2015), and sometimes students noticed constructions in the recordings which they checked back in the module materials later, and, sometimes, the use of deviant forms by other learners led to further engagement with the language in the tutorial itself.

I was listening to the tutor explaining and reading along with Pinyin. I listened to the participants reading and giving their own responses. One of them was slightly off target because there was a contradictory statement which requires 'keshi (but)', so the tutor was then flipping to another slide at some point just to explain 'keshi'. [Sophie, interview]

It is actually helpful [to listen to the students] because you can recognise if they're doing it right or not. […] It's the tones again because I think one of the guys sounds a bit flat, but then mine probably sounds like that as well. [Amy, interview}

4.6.7 Building confidence

The data suggest that the tutorials may have boosted participants' confidence in different ways, for example by seeing other students who were at a similar level of learning, or by realising that they knew enough Chinese to have been able to join in.

I just feel that I can relate more to these people in the recording when they are learning. If they make similar problems that I am making, it is giving me confidence. [Janet, interview]

It is useful to go through the session without any notes and 'join' the session. I'm always surprised how much I remember. This is a real confidence boost!! [Survey]

4.6.8 Experiencing "real interaction"

Participants felt that the recorded tutorials were different from the listening material they encountered as part of their Open University course, and very different from the drills they performed when using language learning apps. This is because the tutorials included "real" people who interacted in real time.

This makes a difference because all my OU course input is through reading and listening clips, here you got someone speaking and giving explanations, it seems to me that that makes it quite memorable just hearing the voices. You can imagine you're participating. [Sophie, interview]

It is good to hear Chinese spoken properly by a person in real time. [Survey]

It made me realise that I haven't really practised introductions or any real interaction because I've mainly learnt phrases from apps. [Survey]

Sometimes it's good to have the pupils talking to each other […]. It makes it more like a real conversation. [Amy, interview]

4.6.9 Feeling connected to other students

We discussed above that there were tensions around how viewers related to the learners who attended the live sessions. While all may have benefited from the interactions in terms of noticing language and opportunities for participating vicariously, not all participants felt connected to the live attenders. Some, however, did feel

such a connection. When asked about this directly, which could be seen as a leading question, Emily used the word 'absolutely' in her answer which indicates her sincerity:

> *Actually, yeah, even though I didn't know them and it was recorded but yes, I did* **absolutely**. *(our emphasis)* [Emily, interview]

She also felt that:

> *It was like when you participated even though it was recorded… . [Emily, interview]*

5 Discussion

In this section, we refer back to the research questions, discuss our findings and consider next steps. We were asking the overarching question: *In what ways do recorded tutorials facilitate learning for beginner Chinese learners in an online course?*

The discussion that is to follow is organized around the three aspects we focused on in our study, namely:
– What use do learners make of the resource?
– What elements do they focus on?
– What perceived benefits, if any, do they report?

5.1 What use do learners make of the resource?

In comparison with the CB1Oct20 cohort, more learners of the CB1Feb21 cohort accessed the recordings when they were offered in conjunction with the study planner. The differences between viewing figures in the two cohorts suggest to us that these resources benefited from being offered in sync with the revision weeks because they were designed as revision materials for consolidation. The fact that three learners worked with all four tutorials, and one worked with three tutorials indicates that these learners, at least, found the recorded tutorials useful, which is further confirmed by survey results. Interestingly, a few learners from higher level courses (Beginners Chinese 2 and 3) also viewed the recordings, which further suggests that the resources, although designed for absolute beginners, can be used as revision and consolidation materials for higher level courses also, especially given the absence of live tutorials. Participants also explicitly commented that the tutorials were useful as a revision resource. This is in line with the previous research finding that recordings provide opportunities for reflection and consolidation (Pleines, 2020a, 2020b; Rabold et al., 2008).

Although we were delighted to note that survey respondents typically watched the whole of the recording, this may, of course, be because learners who only accessed parts of the recording did not then complete the survey – despite the fact that we had made it clear that we were interested in responses also from learners who had not viewed the whole tutorial. One of the main advantages associated with working with a recording is that viewers can focus on the parts they are most interested in and skip others, and they can replay or pause whenever necessary to relisten, repeat or respond to what they are hearing. However, we have insufficient evidence from the survey data regarding the extent to which learners actually did this. Interview participants, however, did report pausing and relistening, and thereby, like the learners in Fernández-Dobao's study (2016), creating spaces for themselves to process and manipulate the language they are hearing. While learners involved in direct interaction are under pressure to respond, listeners have more time to internalise language and thereby develop their linguistic competence, even more so if there is the opportunity to listen more than once.

Technical issues sometimes affected viewing time, for example, two students with long viewing times cited internet buffering problems as a reason. Respondents also discussed the echo and bad audio quality in parts of the recordings, which made the tutorials less useful to them. The first tutorial, in particular, started with audio issues which distracted from learning, and this is reflected in slightly lower ratings for this tutorial. We have since re-recorded this session for use with future cohorts and continue to monitor how the recordings are being used. Bearing in mind these technical challenges to distance teachers and learners (Stickler, 2022; White, 2014), our recommendation for teachers who want to use recorded sessions with their students would be to conduct a trial session and/or allow sufficient time before starting the tutorial to ensure good audio quality for listeners.

5.2 What elements do learners focus on?

While working with the recordings, learners focused on teacher talk, PowerPoint slides, and also on the interactivity, especially when corrective feedback was provided or when participating vicariously themselves. In terms of linguistic features, their focus was on pronunciation, specific grammatical structures as well as the vocabulary and phrases presented in the sessions. Linking the written script to the spoken sound was important to them, and they turned their detailed attention to Chinese characters, if they felt they were learning from them, or, alternatively to Pinyin, if they were not ready for the Chinese characters yet. This once again demonstrates that the lack of obvious correlation between the pronunciation (Pinyin) and the written script (characters) is challenging at the beginners' level as

documented in the literature (Hu, 2010; Jongman et al., 2006; Kan et al., 2018; Liang & van Heuven, 2007; Xiao, 2010), and it suggests that the recorded tutorials can help to address this challenge. Depending on the type of activity, participants in our study also attended to specific slides providing vocabulary and useful expressions, with the video showing the teacher speaking in Chinese or details of the spoken interactions. Additional elements such as the text chat were noted especially when it became part of the learning.

5.3 What perceived benefits, if any, do learners report?

Perceived benefits centre around the idea that the tutorial recordings are a fundamentally different resource from anything else that is offered on the course, or in independent online language learning more generally. Participants felt they were listening to real speakers in real time and thought the explanations helped them understand material they had previously not mastered and to consolidate their learning. They appreciated the pronunciation practice as well as the focus on Chinese writing and benefited from participating vicariously in the interactions they witnessed (Fernández Dobao, 2016; Ohta, 2001). The stimulated recall sequences in the interviews revealed how participants noticed specific structures and attended to errors in other students' speech as well as comparing learners' pronunciation with the teacher's and with their own. There were tensions around the perceived usefulness of listening to other learners, and listeners were aware of the language level of their fellow learners, whose interactions they were witnessing, in comparison to their own competence. Some participants, especially those who had learnt Chinese previously, felt the exercises with learner participation were repetitive and provided flawed input and believed that only the teacher's explanation was helpful for their progress. By contrast, notably those who were absolute beginners, were very clear that they needed to listen to both the teacher and learners' utterances. Several interview participants reported increased confidence and a feeling of connectedness otherwise absent from the course.

Participants' different perceptions of what benefits their learning poses a challenge for learning design as there is clearly a trade-off between the length of tutorials and the level of interactivity in a session. While a teacher-produced screencast without interaction can cover the same content in less time, the interactive sequences scaffold learning by demonstrating approximations of a teacher's expert performance; the latter allow for empathic responses through alignment with other learners and provide opportunities for vicarious participation, practice and consolidation. Clear signposting at the beginning of a recorded tutorial can

help listeners make their own choices how they want to work with the resource to benefit their learning.

6 Conclusions

Videos made by teachers to address specific learning outcomes are currently "sweeping through higher education" (Harrison, 2020, p. 1), but recorded tutorial resources which include student voice and dialogue as a learning tool, although supported by previous research, have received little attention recently. It is interesting to note again that participants in this study saw the recorded tutorials as being fundamentally different from other course resources, with the tutor and live learners being perceived as 'real' in a way that speakers in other audio materials were not. We hope that our project will feed into further research and actions and next steps to improve the success and learning experience for more learners in contexts where the development of scalable tutorial resources could provide support in the absence of live tuition.

Future studies could look in more detail into maximising the effectiveness of recorded online tutorials recordings and establish relevant criteria and design principles, which may vary depending on the language that is being studied and the respective level of the learners. Our research with beginner learners of Chinese points to the strong impact of visually supported explanations by a tutor, and, more generally, to the benefits derived from access to a combination of written and spoken language input. It also suggests potential learning gains from teacher-learner, and learner-learner interactions and from the integration of different affordances in the online room such as text chat. Further trials with both screencasts and recorded interactive group tutorials in different languages and at different levels of study, non-accredited and accredited learning, will be helpful to establish a sustainable strategy in language teaching and curriculum design. The findings can also feed into other provisions of language learning at a scale such as MOOCs, and, more generally, inform our understanding of language learning in online contexts.

Appendix I

Interview Guide

Exploring the use of tutorial recordings for beginner learners of Chinese in the OCLC.
To address the following research questions (RQs):

In what ways do recorded tutorials facilitate learning for beginner Chinese learners in an online course?
a. What use do participants make of the resource?
b. What elements do they focus on?
c. What perceived benefits, if any, do they report?

Background

How long have you been studying Chinese?/Were you a total beginner when starting this course?

What are you enjoying most about the course?

What are the biggest challenges so far?

Have you learnt other languages before?

Have you studied online before?

What are your strengths/weaknesses in language learning?

RQ1a (What use do participants make of the resource?)

You have watched some recorded tutorials. Can you tell me how many you watched and for how long?

Were the recordings easy to access?

(Possible follow up question if they only watched part of a tutorial: which part and why?)

RQ 1b/c (What elements do participants focus on? What perceived benefits, if any, do they report?)

What do you remember most from the tutorials you accessed?

If not covered unprompted, elicit information about
–   Visuals
–   Writing
–   Teacher talk
–   Student talk
–   Question and answer sequences
–   Specific activities
–   Feedback/corrective feedback
–   …

What did you do when watching the tutorials?

If not covered unprompted, elicit information about
–   Replay
–   Skip
–   Take notes

- Practise writing
- Imitate pronunciation
- Answer questions in your head
- …

What did you learn from the tutorials?

Stimulated recall RQ1 b/c (What elements do participants focus on? What perceived benefits, if any, do they report?)

Watch extract 1 <participants are given link to recording and precise timings of extract>

What did you do when watching (e.g. take notes …)?

What did you notice in this extract?

If not covered unprompted, point to

- Visuals
- Writing
- Teacher talk
- Student talk
- Examples of written symbols/language structures/vocabulary/pronunciation
- Correct and deviant language use
- Feedback/corrective feedback

Do you remember what you did when watching this sequence for the first time?

If not covered unprompted, ask about

- Replay
- Skip
- Take notes
- Practise writing
- Imitate pronunciation
- Answer questions in your head
- …

Do you remember how you felt when watching for the first time?

If not covered unprompted, ask about

- empathy: could you identify with the learners/did you feel connected t–them?
- agency/control: did you feel you were in control of your learning? did you feel actively engaged/or like a more passive observer?
- arousal: did you find the session stimulating/interesting or were you bored?

Watch extract 2 <participants are given link to recording and precise timings of extract>

What did you do when watching (e.g. take notes …)?

What did you notice in this extract?

If not covered unprompted, point to

– Visuals
– Writing
– Teacher talk
– Student talk
– Examples of written symbols/language structures/vocabulary/pronunciation
– Correct and deviant language use
– Feedback/corrective feedback

Do you remember what you did when watching this sequence for the first time?

If not covered unprompted, ask about

– Replay
– Skip
– Take notes
– Practise writing
– Imitate pronunciation
– Answer questions in your head
– ….

Do you remember how you felt when watching for the first time?

If not covered unprompted, ask about

– empathy: could you identify with the learners/did you feel connected to them?
– agency/control: did you feel you were in control of your learning? did you feel actively engaged/or like a more passive observer?
– arousal: did you find the session stimulating/interesting or were you bored?

How might watching these sequences help your learning of Chinese?

Final open question

Anything else you want to say about accessing this recorded tutorial or the recorded tutorials in general?

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Bionotes

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