Language proficiency has long been a major focus of research on international students, targeting especially those from non-English background studying in English speaking countries. Language learning is largely deemed a personal responsibility related to learner motivation, personality, social skills and cross-cultural adjustment. However, these perspectives neglect the dynamic linguistic environment in which language learning occurs and have not adequately addressed the relationship between language ideology and practice. This study explores overseas students’ struggles and negotiation in their lived overseas experience where monolingual ideologies of English as the target language meet multilingual realities. Specifically, this study investigates the language learning experiences of Taiwanese higher education students in Australia. Coming from a context where English has been a school and test subject but not a language of daily life, participants face the challenge of practicing English through – usually limited -social network in English. By utilizing an ethnographic approach, the study explores in-depth how language learning intersects with trajectories of Taiwanese students in Australian higher education institutions, including their language desire, their response to linguistic conflicts, and their participation in education and in community. I argue that language is a manifestation of participation, which is a dynamic and constantly changing process. It is insufficient to rely only on language learners’ one-sided efforts for success and multicultural educational institutions are under an obligation to create inclusive conditions that support language learning.

Keywords: Overseas higher education, International students, Second language learning.