Challenges of Chinese University Students’ Oral English Learning

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Abstract

In China, English as a main subject is taught from primary schools till universities, which means students spend at least 10 years studying English in the Chinese education system. However, many Chinese international students who study for their bachelor’s degrees in Canadian universities tend to be silent in the classrooms. This is because they find it difficult to express personal ideas, join in discussions and communicate with local Canadian students in English fluently (Liu, 2002). Research studies show that a majority of Chinese international students who pursue their undergraduate or graduate studies in North American universities found it difficult to join in discussion and communicate with local students in the classroom. Communication problems impeded Chinese students’ in a variety of classroom activities, such as classroom discussion, group tasks, and doing presentations (Liu, 2012). Hence Chinese students’ unsatisfactory oral performance, as a result, impedes their academic and sociocultural transition from their home country into a host country.

Since Chinese international students have already become the single largest group of international students studying at North American universities (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2002, cited in Huang & Brown, 2009), Chinese students’
obstacles in oral English communication deserves more attention. Only through a better understanding of the challenges that Chinese international students encounter can EFL educators provide appropriate pedagogies and create interactive learning environments that will enhance students’ oral English competency. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the challenges that Chinese students experience with oral English, namely, the English learning environment in the Chinese context, the high-stake testing and its impact on oral English learning, and the impact of Chinese traditional cultural issues. Potential solutions are given in light of each of the main challenges for the EFL educators in China to consider.

In the presentation, two theoretical frameworks namely, Confucian-Socratic Framework and Sociocultural Theory will be applied to discuss the issues of sociocultural differences existed between Western culture and Eastern culture. And the impact of such differences on Chinese international students’ academic learning and language learning will be explored and discussed in a critical way. In addition to the analysis based on theories, a wide range of past and current journal articles are used to analyze and support the author’s thoughts.

References
