

ADJUSTMENT FACTORS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN UNITED STATES UNIVERSITIES

Dr. Chia Jung Yeh^{1*}, Dr. Ajay Singh²,
Dr. Michael Shaughnessy²,
Dr. Chih-hung Chung³, Dominique Ratto²

¹*Department of Human Development and Family Science,
College of Health and Human Performance,
East Carolina University, UNITED STATES*

²*College of Education and Technology,
Eastern New Mexico University, UNITED STATES*

³*Tamkang University, TAIWAN*

*Corresponding author: yehch14@ecu.edu

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study is to identify factors that influence the adjustment and academic achievement of East Asian students in United States Universities. Adjustment challenges are primarily attributable to English language proficiency, and culture. Achievement is impacted by English language proficiency, cultural and educational background. A qualitative research design was utilized for this research study. Successful support interventions are reviewed and implications for practice are discussed for East Asian students in the United States.

Keywords: *Language barriers, international students, social constructivism theory*

INTRODUCTION

After Mandarin Chinese, English is the second most popular spoken language in the world (Rosenberg, 2011). According to the 2008 annual report from the United States Institute of International Education (USIIE), during the 2007-08 academic year international students from China and Taiwan comprised the second (81,127) and sixth (29,001) largest groups of students in the United States. Additionally, in the United States, the Chinese have become the third-largest group of immigrants (1,551,316) following by Hispanics, and Filipinos (Terrazas & Devani 2008). There is an ever-growing number of people who are Chinese-English speakers. However, there has been very little research done on this population (Shuhua, Jingpin, Guangqing, 2008). Most of these studies focus strictly on children or chosen participants in Taiwan (Huang, 1997; Chang, 2009; 2010), but few of them studied primarily English-speaking countries and none of them have investigated advance level of English learners such as college or university students.

Some scholars believe that English learners go through similar stages and constructions in order to express similar meanings, and often make the same types of errors (Shuhua, Jingpin, Guangqing, 2008). Several researchers have discovered that there are some problems that arise for English language learners with Chinese backgrounds (Yuan, Woltz, Zheng, 2010; Huang, 2009). Researchers have examined whether or not the language barriers that the students from Taiwan face in the U.S would be different from the previous studies who explored their participants in Taiwan. Furthermore, the previous research studies were often conducted using quantitative approaches to investigate learning problems (Yuan, Woltz, Zheng, 2010; Chang, 2011).

Quantitative and experiential studies cannot reveal the personal experiences of these students from Taiwan. Consequently, this research study used a qualitative approach to explore the problems that Taiwanese students who were learning the English language encountered when they communicate with English speakers, as well as the difficulties and barriers they had to overcome during their collegiate life in the United States.

Research Questions

1. What are the language barriers and difficulties Taiwanese students who are learning and speaking English face in American university campuses?
2. How does having a Mandarin background impact-learning English as a second language when students from Taiwan are studying in American university campuses?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of current and relevant studies on second language learning, as well as to shape a theoretical foundation to explore Taiwanese English language-learning barriers. To build a theoretical foundation, this section will also include constructivism and transformational learning theories and then further discusses language barriers for international students, second language learning difficulties, and Chinese and English language differences and similarities. Finally, the paper will conclude with a discussion of Taiwanese students' English language difficulties and barriers in American universities campuses in the U. S.

Constructivism Theory

Constructivism asserts that knowledge is constructed by learners' own actions and exploration with the environment rather than absorption from, or being taught by others. Therefore, learning is an active process of knowledge construction for each individual to make their own sense of the world, as well as the knowledge of what they construct being reflected by their previous experiences (Adams, 2006; Sercu, Garcia, & Prieto, 2005).

In this research study, researchers have applied constructivism theory to qualitative studies to investigate participants' views and probe for patterns, theories, and generalizations through these individual views and experiences (Creswell, & Clark, 2011).

Nikitina (2010) applied a video project to explore students' Russian language learning experiences and the pedagogical dilemmas they encountered in a constructivist learning situation. Park (2011) utilized social constructivism as a theory framework to shape a qualitative research investigating the content-based literacy instruction of English language learners (ELL) across multiple classroom settings in few American schools.

Kristmanson (2011) conducted a qualitative case study, which was also based on social constructivism theory to investigate French as a second language learning and teaching process. Using cognitive constructivism as theory orientation, O'Toole (2010) examined nine teachers' language-learning experiences and investigated how these teachers constructed personal practical teaching knowledge from their own learning experiences for English language learners.

All of these studies applied constructivism as a theory framework to shape their studies and answer their research questions. Based on the constructivism theory lens, researchers become learners that construct, and investigate participants' experiences from their own perspective and the process of creating meaning from their results (Quinn, 2001). This research study will use the constructivism theory as one of the frameworks to investigate participants' language learning experiences.

Transformational Learning Theory

The transformational learning theory, originally proposed by Jack Mezirow in 1981, describes learning as a meaning making process with an emphasis on construction of personal meaning making, the concepts of perspective meaning, as well as the meaning of schemes (Cooper, 2011). This theory is a desirable process which is often used in adult education and encourages adults to learn and think for themselves, investigates what they want to know through their life experiences, as well as their values, and beliefs (Merriam, 2004).

This theory will support and shape this research study to explore Taiwanese students' English language learning experiences in American universities campuses. The transformational learning theory was not originally used to study second language learning, but language learning can be a powerful vehicle for perspective transformation (John, & Nelson, 2010). There are several studies, which have explored second language learning based on the transformative learning theory (Goulah, 2010; Ajayi, 2008; Poehner, & Van Compernelle, 2011; Foster, 1997).

Johnson & Nelson (2010) investigated the Spanish language learning experiences of three adult women who had not yet achieved proficiency. Ajayi (2008) investigated how high school language learners and their teachers constructed the strategies and the methods of learning English. Ajayi (2008) also

suggested that transformation and a meaning-making theoretical framework could be emphasized as the framework for educational processes.

Phil & Les (2011) did not focus on language learning, but they utilized transformational learning theory as a framework to investigate student experiences of international service learning (ISL). Based on transformational learning theory, the study demonstrated how service-learning initiatives caused students to experience a shift in their world-views.

According to the transformational learning theory, development and learning occurs, when people realize their limitations and shortcomings and make an effort to overcome these difficulties (Mercer, 2006). Mercer (2006) give a further example, as people realize that they have never been good at languages, and the role of educators is to investigate how they make sense of a situation or look for deeper information about these learning assumptions and what it means for themselves.

It would greatly benefit educators to look at the methods these students used to encounter and overcome the problems and difficulties they have towards learning a language. The theory also helps people generate awareness of the process of learning a second language. Therefore, transformational learning theory can be used as a perspective on learning concerns, learning experiences, and meaning-making, and could be utilized to explore adults' second language learning barriers and difficulties.

Cross culture adaption theory

Over the past few decades, few research studies have been conducted on cultural difference adaption. Kim (1988) defined cultural adaption as the process of change overtime, which take place within for those who have already completed their initial socialization process in one culture and then come into continuous, prolonged first-hand contact with an unfamiliar culture or different region/country.

Cross-adaption theory, proposed by Kim (1988) presents cross-cultural adaptation as a cooperative effort that an unfamiliar and a receiving environment tend to be enmeshed. Moreover, as the new events or stresses happened, people or organizations will change their behaviors to adapt to new situations, and this process is continued to be suitable for other new cultures. Haslberger (2005) conducted a forward study of cross-adaption theory, and presented the new scale, such as novelty, discretion, self-efficacy, and social networks, for the improvement of cross-cultural adaptation theory. These scales influence people's behaviors in different culture environments. Cross-cultural adaptation is a complex process in which people become capable of functioning effectively in a different culture.

In this process, people try to adapt to the different culture and change their behaviors. Moreover, these behaviors could be a key to improve their performance in learning second language. Due to this fact, this study proposed and surveyed the Taiwanese learning second language barriers to understand the process of adapting new cultures, so that learners could overcome these barriers to obtain better learning performance.

Language Barriers for International Students

Initial problems of English language learners are basically their linguistic and cultural differences. They often experience cultural and language shock after they first arrive in the United States (Kappan, 2004). When international students come to America to study, it is a very common phenomenon that language learners will experience some language barriers, and difficulties in different America universities campuses (Apaibanditkul, 2011; Lee, 2008; Kirkpatrick, 2001; Olivas & Li, 2006).

Olivas & Li (2006) indicated that language proficiency is a significant factor, which impacts the self-concept and self-efficacy of international students. Some counseling studies have found that the lack of English language proficiency not only influences social interaction with other native speakers, but also creates some self-doubt about their own abilities in a new learning environment (Sheu, & Fukuyama, 2007; Olivas & Li, 2006).

Acquiring language competence would positively impact a person's learning and development (Baker, 2001). Kirkpatrick (2001) revealed that international students encounter both language and cultural barriers. Her study further explored the relationship among international student's language usage, acculturation, and academic performance. The results indicated that students who have a high grade point average (GPA) scores are more immersed in American culture and vice versa.

Castañeda (2008) utilized a qualitative case study to explore the studying experiences in the United States for an international graduate student who came from Latin America. The study discovered that the student encountered second language problems and other cultural adjustment issues. Apaibanditkul (2011) also explored international students' study, yet the study only focused on students from Thailand. The study investigated Thai students' anxiety when they studied on an English speaking campus. The research revealed that Thai student anxiety primary stems from language barriers. These previous studies all focused on the counseling field to investigate international student's stress and anxiety on how language barriers impact their life experiences.

This study focuses on the various types of language barriers graduate level university students from Taiwan may encounter, and the language difficulties that arise from learning a second language.

Second language learning barriers and difficulties

Foreign language learning difficulties often focus on the phonological, syntactic, and semantic components of language, yet Sparks and Ganschow (1991) indicated aptitude might be another aspect to consider when examining second language learning difficulties. In their article, the authors referred to the Modern Language Aptitude Test designed by John Carroll and Stanley Sapon that revealed four "language" factors which reflect foreign language learning aptitude: phonetic coding (sounds), grammatical sensitivity, as well as the capability of memory for foreign language learning material for both phonetic and grammatical associations (Sparks, & Ganschow, 1991).

The authors assert that the lack of any part of each component increases the likelihood of impacting the capability of second language learning. In addition, the age of learning a second language and the level of anxiety would be other factors that could influence language proficiency (Sparks & Ganschow, 1991; Stevens, 2006). Sparks and Ganschow (1993) indicated that if an individual has problems learning their first language, this factor would impact that individual when he/she begins to learn a second language. Therefore, to explore second language learning problems, the study needs to further investigate both the first language and second language capabilities of Taiwanese graduate students.

White (1983) indicated second language learners carry some language structure from their first language, which causes various interference errors when they learn a second language. Comparing the differences in language grammatical systems among Greek, Spanish, and English, Parodi, & Tsimpli (2005) indicated that different language backgrounds could potentially affect the proficiency level of a second language. In adult second language acquisition, when the first language and second language differ in their grammatical system, learners reveal different levels of wrong usage in their second language learning (Parodi, & Tsimpli, 2005).

In order to investigate Taiwanese English language-learning barriers, research should further explore the differences between the Chinese and English language.

Chinese and English language similarities and differences

The Chinese and English language has some similarities and differences. Huang (2010) demonstrated some of those similarities and differences between Chinese and English. In order to further explain the differences between Chinese and English, Huang (2010) gave several examples.

First, the English syntax is inflection based on grammatical gender, number, tense, and voice, yet Chinese is non-inflection. For instance, Chinese has no gender forms and no singular or plural forms. Regarding prepositions, Chinese has four possible locations to place a preposition, but prepositions in English only occur before non-phrases. These differences may impact the process of speaking and writing for Chinese English language learners.

Huang's (2010) study further expressed these salient linguistic features of Chinese would cause communication challenges for advanced Chinese English language learners. Chang (2011) investigated the problems that Chinese learners of English encounter when making refusal responses. Chang (2011) discovered two major problems for Chinese English language learners. The first problem is that the indirect refusal communication style stems from the Chinese thinking approach.

The second problem is Chinese English language learners often use ungrammatical sentences and inaccurate word choices.

Shuhua, Jingpin, and Guangqing (2008) analyzed the sequence development in second language acquisition of a Chinese immigrant English speaker from China. Using a case study, the researchers investigated the acquisition of negation in English. The study utilized 69 negative utterances as negative responses for Chinese English language learners and the results revealed Chinese English

language learners will make similar types of errors on negative sentence usage as they did in their first language.

Wu (1998) investigated the process of cross-cultural adjustment and second language acquisition for Taiwanese students on an American university campus. Although this study explored Taiwanese students on an American campus, the study focused more on cultural adjustment rather than second language learning and language barriers, and also, the published date is too old for proper evaluation as it relates to the current study.

This study applied constructivism and the transformational learning theory together as a foundation to explore the language barriers and difficulties faced by Taiwanese English language learners on an American university campus. Second language learning is a long process and encompasses a variety of challenges, many of which are based on the diversity of student's language background and aptitude. Previous studies have investigated language barriers for international students on United States' campuses, yet no study has focused on the Taiwanese language barriers in America.

To explore the differences and similarities between the Chinese and English language, this study utilized the available literature to help build a stronger foundation to investigate Taiwanese graduate student's language barriers and the experiences they encounter on an American campus.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative methodology was chosen to examine the experiences of Taiwanese students and their language barriers and difficulties. The section includes the research questions, methods used to acquire research participants, protection of human subjects, data collection and analysis, as well as trustworthiness.

Research Setting and Participants

This research study only focuses on the graduate level or above full-time Taiwanese student whose native language is Mandarin, as well as attending Texas Woman's University (TWU) in Denton, Texas. Furthermore, this study interviewed four volunteer Taiwanese graduate students who were willing to provide personal information about their English learning experiences at TWU in the United States. This research study presented a limited scope of Taiwanese students' experiences and language barriers that they face on campus, self-reported by them, rather than measure English language proficiency.

The researcher employed a convenience sampling technique to select four participants who were easily accessible and willing to participate in the study (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Four Taiwanese graduate level students participated in this research study.

One of the Taiwanese participants is a female doctoral student who is a child development major. She has been in the United States for five years and three years at a public research university in the southern region of the United State. Another Taiwanese participant is a male doctoral student in Kinesiology at same

public research university in the southern United State. He has been in America and TWU for a total of 11 months. The other two participants are female master's level students in business administration. One has been in America and in the same university for a total of two years. The other has been in the United States for five years. All four of the Taiwanese participants have met the English exam requirement before applying to the same public research university in the southern United State.

Table 1. Personal Information of the Subjects

Coding	Age	Marital Status	Academic Major	Length of the U.S.	Degree
T01071611	26	Single	Child Development	Five years and three years in an American University	Ph.D. candidate
T02071611	31	Single	Kinesiology	11 months	Ph.D. follower
T03071711	28	Single	Business administration	2 years	M.A. follower
T04073111	32	Single	Business administration	5 years in the U.S. 2 years at TWU	M.A. follower

Data Collection and Analyses

Standardized open-ended interviews were conducted in this study to ensure consistency across all interviews, as well as to avoid variation among interviews (Quinn, 2002). This study utilized face-to-face in-depth interviews with a tape recorder for Taiwanese students. The oral interviews were transcribed to manuscripts word for word. These transcripts were analyzed based on the research questions, constructivism and transformative learning theories, and literature reviews.

After dividing the data into three main categories, including language barriers, learning processes, and Chinese influences, the researchers found sub-themes based on the literature review to correlate to the meaning of the findings.

Basically, the study followed the procedures to analyze the data, including categorizing, classifying, and labeling the main patterns in the data (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Also, the study utilized several coding strategies, including cutting and sorting, theory-related material, and meta-coding (Bernard & Ryan, 2010) to find other sub-themes. The following procedure was utilized during data analyzing which included open coding based on text and theory, memorizing, integrating, refining, and organization (Bernard & Ryan, 2010).

Data Collection Procedures

There were two data collection procedures: one, e-mail to collect demographic and personal information, and two, face to face interviews with digital recording of four Taiwanese students. Data from the interviews were then transcribed.

Data Analysis and Procedures

The data analysis procedures followed the following steps.

1. Divide all transcribed data into three categories: language barriers, learning process and Chinese influence based on the literature review and research questions.
2. Categorize, classify, and label the main patterns or codes in the data (Creswell & Clark, 2011)
3. Segment data into chunks to conform to the set of themes, and then find the recurrent themes (Bernard, & Ryan, 2010)
4. Analyze data and write a final report.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the study was considered through internal validity, reliability, and external validity or generalizability (Merriam, 1995). The following strategies were implemented to ensure trustworthiness:

1. *Triangulation* (Quinn, 2002) – the study will utilize a variety of data sources to explore research questions, including oral interviews, e-mail interviews, and self-reports of their English ability. Furthermore, the researcher will interview two Americans who know these Taiwanese students to reflect on their experiences with Taiwanese students, which will confirm and enhance the findings.

2. *Member checking* (Merriam, 1995) – This will be done to improve data collections and tentative interpretations by going back to the people from whom they received the data and asking if the data is plausible.

3. *Peer review* - In investigator triangulation (Quinn, 2002), the study will invite the English tutor as a data investigator to read these interview transcripts, discuss and further evaluate these data, find the themes, and conduct the comparisons with the primary or first researcher. Discussions will be held with the professor and the English tutor as a research team regarding the progress of the study, the congruency or emerging findings from the raw data, and the tentative interpretations.

4. *Researcher adequate engagement in data collection* – The researcher will spend adequate time collecting data so that the data becomes “saturated” (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

5. *Statement of researcher experiences*- Quinn (2002) indicated that a qualitative researcher is the instrument. Merriam (1995) also demonstrated one method to enhance the trustworthiness of the qualitative researcher which is to clearly express the researcher’s experiences to avoid bias, as well as to gain a better understanding of how the data will be interpreted. The researcher is a current doctoral student from Taiwan studying at Texas Woman’s University. In order to avoid bias, the researcher will write the research and interview notes. During the interview, the researcher will only ask the research questions without providing personal comments. Furthermore, the researcher has taken advance quantitative research methods with mixed research approach courses in the spring of 2011, as well as completed a master’s level qualitative research method course in Taiwan, and attended a qualitative workshop in 2002. Researchers utilized

action research methods with qualitative data analysis to evaluate and develop her master thesis in Taiwan.

FINDINGS

The finding has three sections based on the research questions, including language barriers, learning process, and Chinese influence. The research and interview questions are also presented in table two below. To provide an overview of research findings, a summary table of themes is presented in table three.

Table 2. Research Questions VS Interview Questions

Research questions	Category	Interview Questions
What are the language barriers and difficulties that Taiwanese students who are learning and speaking English face on American university campuses?	Language Barriers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is your opinion of the barriers and difficulties that Taiwanese students who are learning and speaking English face on American university campuses? How about your personal barriers and difficulties? 2. Describe your experiences during your first semester in the United States? 3. How did your language barriers impact your ability to communicate with your professors, peers, or others on campus? 4. How did you do in class participation? 5. What was the most difficult aspect of learning English for you?
	Learning Process	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. What has changed in your language barriers since you began studying on an American campus? When or how long did it take to notice the change? 7. What changes have you noticed about the ways you participate in class interaction and discussion?
How does having a Mandarin background impact learning English as a second language when Taiwanese students are on American university campuses?	Chinese Influence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe the major differences between Chinese and English language learning? 2. Do you think Chinese has impacted your English language learning? How does having a Mandarin background impact learning English as a second language on American university campuses or impact communication with American peers? 3. How is your thinking process? Do you think in English or do you think in Chinese first and then translate it into English? Which way is more effective for you?

Table 3. Summary table of Themes

Research questions	Themes
Research question 1-1: Language Barriers	Listening, Emotional Reflection, Public Speaking and General Expression, writing, and Dilemma
Research question 1-2: Learning process	Learning Pathway
Research question 2: Chinese Influences	Grammar, Chinglish, Effective thinking pattern

Language barriers

To answer the first group of research questions, the study discovered six themes, which emerged from all of transcriptions, including listening, emotional reflection, pronunciation, public speaking and general expression, writing, as well as dilemma.

Listening is the most problematic language barrier these Taiwanese students faced when they first came to American campuses. The theme emerged based on several code patterns, including general listening perception, fast speech, slang and jokes. Four of the students felt listening were very difficult and they could not understand what people said, especially when Americans were making jokes, and using slang. They also felt the speed of speaking was vastly different compared to when they were listening to the English radio or interacting with Americans in Taiwan. Different cultures created a "Filter," so Taiwanese students have a communication obsession during the early year in the U.S.A.

Moreover, this barrier urged students to adapt a new cultural background. According to the cross culture adaption theory, Taiwanese students in the early academic year confronted many barriers and difficulties learning English. They, however, reduced this barrier when they adapted to the new culture in the U.S.

Example of general listening perception

T03: My first semester was really hard. I still remembered the first class. I can [could] say that I was sitting there in the classroom, but I could not understand what my professor was talking about. ...I think my listening was not good during that time. {General Listening Perception}

T04: I really have [had a] hard time to know what they were doing. I hoped they could write down anything because if I could read what they were writing down, I can [would/could] understand better. If they only say [said] it, I would not get it. If they write [wrote] it, I will [would] get it right away. {General Listening Perception}

T02: You cannot expect all of American[s] would [to] have clear pronunciation or patience for [with] international students. So, the problem is my listening comprehension. When they speak very fast, sometime I cannot follow. {General Listening Perception}

Example of perception of fast speech

T02: Although I listen[ed] [have listened] to online radio for a long time, I still have a problem listening to some instructors' talking. {Perception of Fast Speech}

T04: I think most of my American classmates speak very fast. We learn[ed] English in Taiwan, and basically the English in Taiwan they speak [is/was spoken] kind of slowly. Here people speak very fast and have their own accent, Texas accent, south[ern] accent. They also use a lot of slangs. It is kind of difficult for me. {Perception of Fast Speech}

T02: You cannot expect all of American[s] would [to] have clear pronunciation or patience for [with] international students. So, the problem is my listening comprehension. When they speak very fast, sometime I cannot follow. {Perception of Fast Speech}

Example of slangs and jokes

T02: I cannot [could not] follow [what] the professor said, especially when they used metaphor, so it is [was] kind of language barrier. I also do [did] not have some culture [cultural] background knowledge to understand these [the/his] terms. {Slangs and Jokes}

T02: I have [had] one classmate [who] talked [with] a lot of slang[s] I cannot [could not] understand. {Slangs and Jokes}

T02: Some people express with incredible imagination, which is quite challenging [for me] to catch up with, especially when they are joking. {Slangs and Jokes}

T03: My first semester was really hard. I still remembered the first class. I can [could] say that I was sitting there in the classroom, but I could not understand what my professor was talking about. ...I think my listening was not good during that time. {Slangs and Jokes}

The second theme this study found is emotional reflection. After finding several similar types of recurrent codes of emotional reflections, the researcher grouped them together and found an “emotional reflection” theme. They mentioned several emotional reflections, such as shyness, embarrassment, and nervousness. Miller and Endo (2004) also indicated similar emotional reflection such as anxiety which was created by language barriers, especially when these second language learners are not proficient in their new language. Regarding the cultural difference, Taiwanese traditional cultures made most students shy with asking people questions and articulating their feelings. This was due to one of traditional cultural phrases, “The more you do, the more mistakes you make. The less you do, the fewer mistakes you make,” and this urged students to attempt to speak. Taiwanese students, however, seldom talked with other people using English.

Example of emotional reflection

T01: I think [when] general Taiwanese students come here, they are shy to speak English. They do not prepare very well on listening and speaking. {Shyness}

T01: So they come here, but they cannot speak very well because their general writing is better than speaking. Especially we can take exam[s] very well because we can learn from the words, but we do not have peers to practice our speaking. I think general Taiwanese students are nervous to talk English with other [people]. {Shyness}

T03: Also in our culture, we are shy and we don't ask question when we don't understand. That is really bad for us, I think. I believe that most people from Taiwan do not use English as much as people from China or other European people. That is the part of [the] reason we cannot speak insistently. {Shyness}

T03: If we need to discuss the topic right away, I have no idea how to talk about [it]. It is embarrassing. {Embarrassment}

T03: Yes, and I am [was] nervous when I do [did] not understand some small parts. {Nervousness}

T04: When you speak [spoke] in front of American[s], you have [had] already [been/become] nervous because we do [did] not practice a lot in the university.

You have [had] to present and you present[ed] in English. [It] is very hard. {Nervousness}

The third main theme this study has found is pronunciation. Taiwanese Students indicated that Taiwanese might not be able to pronounce some specific sounds like L and R, as well as some linking or assimilated sounds.

Example of pronunciation

T04: Umm...(thinking) I think it is still pronunciation. {Pronunciation}

T04: I cannot pronounce some word like Rule; I cannot pronounce L and R something. For example, lecture [Looking at her American Boyfriend] Letters. {Pronunciation}

American Friend: no, lettuce, L-e-t-t-u-c-e

T04: I will pronounce "Letters"

Public speaking and general expression is the fourth theme. Most of Taiwanese students mentioned their difficulties in expressions and public speaking. They all needed to memorize the content or to write down what they wanted to say at the beginning of the study on an American campus. They all indicated that they had to do some preparation before they talked. Sometime they needed to think more, and write down what they wanted to say first.

Example of public speaking and general expression

T03: If there is a presentation, I have to memorize all of sentences I would say for the presentation [it]. Basically I can understand what is going on between the professors and my classmates. {Memorized}

T04: Before the presentation, I have [had] to write down everything and memorize [d them]. Try [ing/tried, I tried, I was trying] to do my best. {Memorization}

T02: The first time, I have [had] not [had never] presented before, so I wrote down all sentences. I tried to memorize it, but I did not have time. I just read the lines on PowerPoint. The only thing I could do is [was] I read and made eye contact. {Memorization}

T04: The second thing I remembered most is [was] my presentation because English is [was] not my first language. You try [tried] to do presentation in front of all Americans. It was so hard. Actually, we did not have many opportunities to present every week in Taiwan, but here every other two weeks [every other week or two], you have [had] presentations or you speak [spoke] up. {Difficulty}

T03: R: Could I say your language barriers is when you hear someone to talk, you can understand 70 to 80 %, but you cannot express directly out when you want to say something? {Difficulty}

T03: For speaking and writing, it is not an easy part. If the topic is [a] new thing, and I have never heard about it, I have no idea how to talk about it. It is kind of one of my barriers, I think. {Difficulty}

T02: Also, I think [thought] I have [had] little barrier on [in/with] conversation. I have [had] difficulties with administrator on [at] the financial and international office[s]. {Difficulty}

The fifth language barriers researchers have found is writing. Generally, these Taiwanese students all believed writing, especially academic writing, was difficult for them. Writing is related to grammar and logic. If students do not have an American thinking pattern, their writing may not be easy to follow and be understood by American readers. Chinese culture influenced students writing behaviors. For example, Chinese writers were used to adopting an ambiguous writing approach to express special artistic conception. However, American writing style was used to adopt clear and definite words to express their content in various articles and writings (Gonzalez, Chen, & Sanchez, 2001).

Example of writing

T01: Because I think grammar [includes] the writing and speaking, so maybe I can speak very simple words, but I cannot exactly [say] the grammar correctly. So the most difficult is grammar. {Grammar}

T03: For writing, we have to read like 100 books to become a good writer. {Writing}

T02: For writing, I mean for general Taiwanese [the] problem is on writing. Especially for the students only pass IELT. They still have problems. They still need to consult the writing site for [a] couple [of] years. But I do not have this problem, but it does not mean my writing is perfect. But my writing logic is more similar to American. {Writing}

T04: I might not have good written English because my written English is [was] not really that good. I will [would] try to make some points or ideas, and my American partners will [would] write. {Writing}

Studying on American campus, these Taiwanese students understood they should interact more with American students on campus to advance their English ability. However, they either did not have enough time to interact with American students, or they experienced some barriers between American students and themselves. They might experience some difficulties in developing friendship with American friends. Therefore, the sixth theme of dilemma emerged from the transcriptions.

Example of dilemma

T02: The barrier is [was] I spend a lot of time at home, so I had a bad feel[ing] on [about] my courses. I felt [I was] being grounded. {Time Limitation}

T02: I feel [felt] that I am [was] not allowed to go out because I have [had] a lot of assignments, and I cannot [could not] go out. {Time Limitation}

T04: Actually, [during] the first semester, the couple of first months were really hard. I did not have time to hang out with American friends because my homework was heavy and overwhelming. {Time Limitation}

T03: I do not have many friends on campus. {Friendship}

T04: Asian is kind of minority. Majority is American, so they think you are different, too. So you know, it is kind [of] make friend with them, or become.... [stop] I do not know. The language is kind of barrier like. We really want to make friends with them, but the background is different. {Friendship}

Learning process

For the learning process, the data analysis is based on the four Taiwanese students, but does not include the two other Americans. The result indicates that the four Taiwanese students have different learning processes, and had different experiences in improving their English.

The first Taiwanese student is a female doctoral student from the public research university in the southern United State Child Development Department. She studied in the Language school during her first year in the US. T01 indicated that during that time, every English skill was problematic for her, especially English vocabulary. She could not talk; understand what people would say at the beginning of the study on the American campus. But after two to three years, her English barriers became grammar and writing. In her learning process, with her culture adaption, her barriers were changed. Hence, understanding the barriers from Taiwanese students is cumulative. For help, students would adapt to a new culture; furthermore, International students improve their learning performance in terms of learning English.

The second Taiwanese student, T02, is a male doctoral student in Kinesiology at a public research university in the southern United State. He has been in the US for 11 months. He has never studied in any language school in the United States. He felt his reading and writing had improved after two weeks since he came here. Yet his listening and speaking abilities seemed to decrease because his courses were mostly online. He did not have enough chances to interact with others in person and this impacted him greatly. The other obvious improvement was his presentation skill through reading from the words on the various PowerPoint presentations. He could finally use only his own words during the presentation after the third or fourth presentation without having to read from the Power Point.

The third Taiwanese student, T03, was a female student who studied in Business Administration and Health Care Administration (Dual Program) at the same public research university in the southern United State. She has been here for two years. Before she came to the US, she studied in a language school in Canada for six months.

Before coming to the US, she believed it was very important to understand each word and sentence of English in her communication. But after practicing more English and staying in America for a while, her beliefs had changed to the understanding that a few words or sentences may not influence her total listening comprehension. The other change was that in Taiwan she focused more on grammar, yet on the America campus, she did not focus more on this because the main point was in rather proper or global communication.

The fourth Taiwanese, T04, was a female student in Business Administration at same university. She has been here for five years. In her first semester, it was very difficult to work on the team projects and class participation. She used to have to write all words she would speak in class on paper and practiced saying them beforehand. After she found a job on campus, she gained more opportunities to practice her English. Six months to one year later, she did not need to write down any sentence before she spoke out as before. However, she still prepared and read

course materials thoroughly before attending classes because English for class discussion was more academic English.

The most difficult part was still written English. Currently, she still needs to go to the writing center to check her papers in terms of writing, grammar, syntax, sentence structure, spelling and the like before she submits them to the professors.

Chinese influence

In Chinese Influence, the researcher considered only questions 8-10 of the interview questions from the four interviewees. Through reading the transcriptions again and again, the researcher has found three obvious themes emerging from all transcriptions, namely grammar, Chinglish, and effective thinking pattern.

The first theme: Grammar

All four Taiwanese students mentioned the most significant difference between Chinese and English were sentence structures, especially in verb tenses. In Chinese, all agreed there were no present, past or future tenses, so the difference impacted greatly on them when they used tense in English. One student also mentioned she got confused differentiating pronominal genders “he” and “she” during conversation. In Chinese, there is no gender in pronouns. Therefore, they all agreed the huge difference between Chinese and English for them was grammatical differences. The following sentences are the answers from the interview transcriptions showing interviewees’ answers about the differences.

Example of grammar

T01: She and he is the first example. In Chinese, like present, past tense, we did not have tense in Chinese. So it impacts me to misuse the tense in English.

T02: When I communicate with my American peers, I usually used the wrong tense. And language structures are different.

T03: As what I noticed, a lot of Chinese forgot to use verb in their sentences because we do not have tense in Chinese.

T04: If I just translate in Chinese, then my English grammar is not right.

The second theme: Chinglish

The using of Chinese structures in speaking or writing in English is called Chinglish. There were two students mentioning the terms directly. However, the same concept, similar to the word Chinglish were also mentioned by the other two students. Therefore, the researcher named the theme with the concept. Three students mentioned that Taiwanese students would have Chinglish problems when they would just directly translate their expressions from Chinese to English. Below are the interviewees’ expressions about Chinglish.

Example of Chinglish

T02: You may say this is gift, but I did not have Chinglish problem.

T02: When I was a freshman in college, I was trained my spoke English. I also started listening English radio. Maybe it is why I gain the English thinking pattern.

T02: I guess it is why I can avoid the Chinglish problem. I may make mistakes, but I do not make Chinglish sentences. Long time no see is Chinglish, but it was accepted now.

T03: Sometime I said in English, but actually it is Chinese structure. That did not make sense for American. It likes I used English words, but the structure is Chinese.

T03: My friend used to tell me the sentence that I have a long time did not see you.

T03: This is English word, but Chinese structure.

T04: Sometimes we just translate every word into the sentences, but we think it is English, but it is not.

T04: If I just translate in Chinese, then my English grammar is not right. Sometimes people say Chinese English is Chinglish. They called Chinglish. I heard my coworker said about that. It is like Chinese English.

The third theme: Effective Thinking Model

Though some of them utilized Chinese thinking patterns first when they dealt with some unfamiliar topics or background subjects, they all believed thinking in English or English thinking pattern was a more effective way to use and express correct English. Their answers to the interviews showing their ideas are shown below.

Example of effective thinking model

T01: Until now, I can hear the English, and then directly use English thinking.

T02: I think that the most effective way is to just take American thinking. It will make good English sentences. It also will keep smooth for the conversation. I tried to train myself to react as American thinking, so I directly think in English.

T03: If I can think English all the time, it is more effective. For example, when Americans talk, they just talk, and talk. They do not think about the grammar, the structure, and so on. Because English is their language just like we are talking about Chinese.

T03: If I think in English, it can be more effective. If I think in Chinese, and then translate to English, the topic has been finished and gone to next issue. It is too late for me to process. It happens a lot.

T04: I will directly think in English. I will interact with English and I will say it quickly. If I go traveling here, I learned the experiences in English. I will think it in English without translation.

In summary, Chinese background actually impacts the way these Taiwanese think and use English. Huang (2010) also indicated first language plays a role in second language learning. These Taiwanese have experienced that they utilized the Chinese structures in speaking, and writing in English. Sometimes they may need to use Chinese models to understand some unfamiliar concepts and terms. Yet, they all believe English thinking patterns without processing a translation between Chinese and English is a more effective way to learn and use English. They also identified their grammatical mistakes, especially verb tenses, as a major barrier when they communicate with others on an American campus.

Limitations

This research was a summer class project and has certain limitations. Due to the time limit, only a small number of data samples have been collected. For the same reason, the data analysis could have been done and interpreted more thoroughly through different related fields and aspects, especially in view of language acquisition, language learning, social interactions and even comparative or some other fields of linguistics.

Implications and Recommendations

There are many groups of people who can benefit from this research pilot project, for example, Taiwanese (and Chinese) students who come to study in American universities and have to master English proficiency for their educational accomplishment, English as a Second Language or Foreign Language teachers who have to teach international students, especially Taiwanese, and, American university professors who have to provide instruction to Taiwanese students.

These preliminary research results can help these educators understand what Taiwanese students have to go through in order to achieve their academic goals in U.S. schools.

It is recommended that further detailed research be conducted to include more interview subjects from a wider sampling pool. Additional more specific, exact, precise and detailed research should also be done to systematically identify linguistic features, genres, realms and other aspects so we can truly understand the differences and influences of the Chinese language as mother tongue (L1) on their English language learning (L2). This understanding may provide a great insight for both students and teachers of English language for Taiwanese students.

SUMMARY

The research findings answer and reaffirms that Taiwanese students who study in an American campus face several language barriers. The results reveal that listening, public speaking and general expression, as well as writing, are their most common language barriers. They are also in a language dilemma between schoolwork, and their personal, social interaction with American friends. In the public speaking section, they all have similar emotional reflections concerning speaking out in front of people in their second language. Though they have similar language barriers and difficulties, their learning pathways vary depending on their own improvement directions and concerns. These Taiwanese students all believe thinking in English is the most effective thinking model for correct English usage in order to avoid Chinglish. They realize Chinese language structure is different from English language structure.

Appendix 1

Conflict of interest

Authors have declared no conflict of interest.

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APPENDIX 1

Symbol Explanation.

The four Taiwanese students coded as T followed by the number of order and date of interview. For example, first Taiwanese student interview was held on August 3, so the code would be T01080311. The second Taiwanese student interview was held on August 4, so the code would be T02080411, and the remainder of the participants will be coded following the same rules to make the code logistical and systematic.

[] corrected or suggested version for participants' English expressions

{ } coding and themes

Abbreviation of Interviewees ID Coding

First character T = Taiwanese Student Interviewee

First character A = American Interviewee

First two digits = Interviewee Number

Six digit number = Interview Date (mmddyy)

Example: T01071611 and A02073011

Interviewee IDs are shortened for ease of use. For example, T01 means T01071611; T02 means T02071611 in the transcriptions examples. The remainder of the participants will utilize abbreviation codes following the same rules to make the identify code logistical and systematic.