HOW ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE AFFECTS CHINESE STUDENTS GIVING PRESENTATIONS DURING CLASS IN U.S.

A Thesis Proposal

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By

Ning Zhou, B.A.

Dr. Bill Bauer

Dr. Dorothy Erb

Marietta College

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ABSTRACT

This research is a study of students from China who speak English as their second language. These students are not proficient enough to meet the standard college requirement. Students from China describe their experiences of frustrations and anxiety during presentations and they use strategies to cope with language inefficiency.

Interviews and data collection was conducted with 30 students who enrolled a course titled “English as a Second Language” at Marietta College. Most of these students think that pronunciation, unfamiliar cultural content, heavy accents and anxiety because of speaking a second language play roles in their communication and presentation problems. They believe learning English as a second language is the most difficult obstacle to overcome during their academic studies, especially in the Business and Marketing majors. The research will also present findings from students’ points of view about speaking strategies they frequently use while giving presentations in front of class and what kind of teaching methods that are helpful for them.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the U.S., speaking fluent English is the primary requirement for students to be successful in their field of study, but some students who speak English as their second language are not meeting this requirement. This problem begins to attract the researcher’s attention since the number of foreign students is increasing, with the largest group being Chinese. (see Appendix A)

When students in China study English in China, there is a misunderstanding: the higher the scores they got in TOEFL, GRE or GEMT, the higher the skills they have in English. As soon as Chinese students arrive in the U.S., they find that the English they learned in China is far away from effective, especially for the communicating with other native English speakers.

At that time, the researcher realizes that when people learn a language, communication is the purpose, not the language itself. A good second language learner needs to learn American cognitive styles, self-expression, accent, and communication habits or they will lose the meaning of learning English.

When these students from China go to the class, they usually feel that the most difficult aspect is giving a presentation in front of the class, not only because English
is their second language, but they feel difficulty and anxiety about making errors. The errors may come from different directions. One error is confusing about the culture. Also, wrong pronunciations of long and wieldy English words make them nervous. Strong accents and different speaking habits may cause misunderstanding among listeners.

A majority of the students from China choose Economics, Marketing, and Accounting classes which require effective communication skills and presentations during the class. These students currently do not have the ability to express themselves fully and freely which causes poor performance, anxiety, and communication apprehension during presentation. The more the fear of negative evaluations are given the less the conversations and interactions are initiated (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002). The less the conversations and interactions are initiated, the slower the Chinese students can improve their second language speaking skills.

Statement of the problem

During a presentation students from China do not only try to memorize the new and unfamiliar content, but also need to translate Chinese into English in their mind first and then to express their thoughts and feelings. According to Gregersen & Horwitz (2002), The inability to express themselves fully and freely or to understand what another person says can easily lead to more anxiety and frustration, less confidence, and even apprehension that it is impossible for them to communicate. (p. 562).
Above all, students from China are not prepared well for effective communications to present themselves with or in front of American peers and professors or any native English speakers due to speaking English as a second language.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research is to inform the educators that they could help these students from China by being aware of their different language background. Through the process of understanding the language difference and difficulty, American educators can help these students to find a variety of strategies and prepare different teaching methods for the students to facilitate students from China to reach their success in studying in America.

It requires effort and time from both students from China and American educators to pursue that goal together. The researcher hopes this research will make some contributions.

Research questions

This study was framed by the following questions: What are the Chinese students’ perceptions of listeners’ attitudes towards their speaking skills, and how do those attitudes affect students during presentations? How do students want their teachers and classmates to help them to improve their speech skills and what kind of help is the most effective? What are the strategies used most by students from before, during, and after the speech and what strategies do they perceive as most useful? How can these strategies help them to improve speaking skills?
Research hypotheses

Null - there was no performance difference if the students felt anxious, or frustrated when speaking English as second language in front of class.

Alternative - there was performance difference if the students felt anxious of frustrated when speaking English as second language in front of class.

Null - Communication-anxious individuals who were speaking a second language and fear negative evaluation initiate same amount of conversation and interaction as those who are not communication anxious.

Alternative - Communication-anxious individuals who were speaking second language and fear negative evaluation initiate less or minimal conversation and interaction.

Definition of terms

Culture---“the sum of total ways of living, including values, beliefs, aesthetic standards, linguistic expression, patterns of thinking, behavioral norms, and styles of communication which a group of people has developed to assure its survival in a particular physical and human environment” (Pusch, 1979).

Learning strategies---“Behaviors or thoughts that a learner engages in during learning that are intended to influence the learner’s encoding process. More specifically, learning strategies are “operations employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information”. Specific actions taken by the learner to making learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” (Oxford, 1990, p.8).
Communication apprehension---“fears of negative evaluation, and test anxiety evoke an image of a language learner who is overly concerned with the “appearance” of his or her communication attempts” (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002 p. 563).

Limitations of the study

There are several limitations in this research that need to be mentioned. Only a small group of 20 students from China learning a specific language (English) were observed and examined in the same college, under similar teaching styles which does not make generalizations for the all second language learners all over the world.

Second, language performance may be different with people who plan to major in business and marketing which requires high speech skills and interaction with people frequently. On the other hand some students just use English as a tool to learn their majors such as major in math or computer science. Different majors also play an important role of how often students from China present in their field and how much perfection their instructors required.

Finally, different personalities influence Chinese students’ different performance during presentations. Enough preparation of the material before the presentation also plays an important role of levels of anxiety during the presentation.
Heikinheimo and Shute (1986) did a qualitative study and found language skills and social interactions were the most difficult problem for Chinese students due to English being their second language. These students were more likely to have more knowledge and experiences if they could adapt to and enjoy frequent contact with their professors and classmates. Their successful achievement of academic goals is easy to reach if the emotional and social atmosphere is pleasant and friendly instead of stressful and frustrating.

There are five factors that can cause poor performance while presenting or communicating:

1. **Chinese culture and personal prior knowledge**

   The researcher can not say Chinese culture is totally different with American culture, but there are a lot of differences which cause the students from China to misunderstand meaning or feel confused about the content.

   According to (Wang, 2002 p.98), “Immense differences separate Chinese students’ cultural experiences and prior knowledge away from their American classmates”. This gap often leads to difficulty in understanding class content such as the courses titled “Sociology and American History”. Students frequently like to
construct meaning based on their existing knowledge and experiences, the closer the
match between their prior knowledge and the new knowledge, the more accurately
they comprehend (Wang, 2002).

Tierney and Cunningham (1984) found that “there is a causal relationship
between background knowledge and comprehension” (P.612). Comprehension is an
interaction of new information with old knowledge that stores in an existing mental
what they read only as it relates to what they already know” (P. 94). Based on the
theory above, there is not doubt that why Chinese students have so much difficulties
while studying in U.S.

An example of the effect of cultural influence on students’ conversation with
American peers and instructors occurs when students from China are involved in
discussion about football games. Football games are very popular conversation among
Americans, but they are very hard for students from China to comprehend, simply
because in China there are no football games. The students have no clue of how to
understand this popular cultural phenomenon related to their background. (Wang, 2000)

Similarly, American students find it is very hard to understand or enjoy the
Chinese Beijing opera, even though it is an important treasure of the Chinese cultural
heritage. The reason for this difficulty is that most American students do not have the
prior knowledge of opera. (Wang, 2000)

According to Briggs (1983), there is a training program for people who must
interact with different cultures. When people experience a new cultural environment,
they are likely to experience conflict and confusion between their own cultural predisposition and the values, beliefs, and opinions passed from their previous generations. Even if a person can adapt to a culture very well and quickly, he still has the problem of using a different language for a long time. A training program, the “Cultural Communication Capsule,” can aid in cross-cultural adaptation by improving interpersonal and social communication skills.

2. Chinese teaching style

Elkins (1994) discussed salient patterns within the American and Chinese education systems, noting that Chinese students are praised for engaging in class by being silent and listening carefully, while the American system emphasizes self-reliance and self-confidence. American teachers like their students to present their own ideas and talk with each other during class. Comparing the Chinese and American cultures, students from China should attend more interpersonal communication courses and suggest lesson plans for American teachers to use.

In China, teachers use a very traditional teaching methodology which is very different with other countries. “The current methodology employed is reliant on 'talk and chalk'” (Niu & Wolff, 2004, p.6) Teachers are the main talkers during the class. Students are not allowed to speak until they are asked and then get teachers’ permissions to answer questions. The goal of attending class is to listen to teachers’ lectures, write down the notes and memorize them. There is no discussion, teamwork, or speech that students need to give during the class.

The teachers’ job is standing at the front of the blackboard and copying sections from the text onto the board, “while the students sit quietly and absorb the
teacher's 'words of wisdom’’. The students’ responsibility is to follow teacher order and remember exactly what teachers tell them that they should know. After the class, students need to complete exercises and remember the content so that they can pass the exam. “Little emphasis is placed on teaching students how to critically appraise information and situations or to think creatively (outside the box)” (Niu & Wolff, 2004, p.6).

Above all, students from China have little experience as independent, creative learners. This is the main reason why Chinese students feel less confident and more anxious when speaking in front of the class, especially speaking the second language.

3. Foreign accents

According to Derwing (2003), “How to represents oneself to others is voluntary, there are some things that are either very difficult or nearly impossible to control. An individual’s speech tells a listener far more than the way one is dressed, the car one drives, or the hairstyle one wears. Generally speaking, people tend to hold biases with regard to accented speech; the further the accent is from their own, the more likely they are to experience negative reaction to it.” (p. 548) Listeners judge people to be less educated and less intelligent based on their poor language speaking (Bradac, 1990).

There are two reasons that indicate why students from China are afraid of giving presentations during the class, the fear of negative evaluations and making errors. It is very common that foreign or second language learners are afraid of negative evaluation which likely to cause students’ over concern with academic and
personal evaluation of their performances and competencies (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

Second language learners keep making all kinds of errors during the presentation. “Errors can be the source of anxiety in some individuals because they draw attention to the difficulty of making positive social impression when speaking a new language” (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989, p.39).

4. Perfectionism

Most students from China are very serious about their study and they try their best to make it perfect. After they realize that English is too tough as a barrier to overcome, then the symptoms show their unwillingness to volunteer to respond to questions unless they are certain of the correct answer or find a suitable word. Chinese students can also become overly emotional and “catastrophic” reactions to minor failures and low productivity. (Gregersen, 2002)

According to Brophy (1999), “Readers who are familiar with the literature of foreign language anxiety are likely to notice a number of parallels from it to these descriptions of perfectionism. It is important to note that as for anxious language learners, the success of perfectionists is often impeded because they spend their energy avoiding mistakes rather than focusing on learning. Not only do they refrain from classroom participation, but they also indulge their work habit” (p. 112).

5. Better in reading & writing than listening and speaking.

Most of the students from China learn English in China for at least 6 years. They take the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) before they are admitted to college and universities in U.S. However, getting a good score on the test
does not guarantee that their English is effective enough to study in the U.S. When Chinese students study English in China, the emphasis is more on reading and writing than listening and speaking. When American professors lecture class or peers speak English to students from China, students would rather read notes than listen. Sometimes, students from China would rather write down or use gestures to let Americans understand what they are talking about than actually speaking.

There are 3 strategies that can help students from China to improve their language learning skill of communication.

1. **Motivation**

   The strong motivation of being a good language learner makes students successful. “There are three factors related to language learning-aptitude, motivation, and opportunity. What is clear is that the good learner has or creates all of these and the poor learner does not.” The good language learner will seek out opportunities to use the language by creating a good relationship of a language peer partner to talk often, go to movies or to cultural events. Joining clubs or working part-time or even voluntarily will ensure they improve their communication skills because it will give them a better understanding of others. Rubin (1975) initiates “conversation with the teacher or his peer students or even strangers who comes your way in the target language. He will usually take advantage of every opportunity to speak in class” (p.43-47).

2. **Teamwork**

   Seeking opportunities to interact with native speakers is viewed as a characteristic of good language learners. Working as a team not only can improve
academic studies, but also can improve Chinese students’ communication and social interaction skills.

Teamwork in the class provides students from China with the opportunity to verbalize and share their ideas with American students. This improves their language skills by listening and communicating. In addition, properly assigned teamwork forces students from China to speak English and increase their social interaction skill. They can learn best when they interact with the other group members, share their ideas, and learn the way that native English speakers express themselves. The team members support and encourage each other by discussing the material, making decisions about ways to approach problems, preparing the report and presenting the result. All of these are very helpful for students from China to master the skills of communication (McDonald, 1995).

3. Use English in daily life

Languages must be used, learned and retained frequently. The most effective way to do this is by integrating English speaking into Chinese students' daily lives so that it is not something that students do only once a week or only during classes. The students should use language such as listening and speaking as often as possible on a daily basis at home, school and class or in the community. Students can learn English by phone or through TV and video. Good listening and speaking skills are essential to sending, receiving and understanding messages. Chinese students should try their best to speak properly such as making messages understood by using the correct grammar, sentence structure, tone, and pronunciation (Illinois State Board of Education).
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Research design

Data for the study was gathered through explanatory design, which consisted of first collecting quantitative data and then collecting qualitative data to help explain the quantitative results. Thirty students from China in the second level of ESL class were participated. Data collection procedures included a collection of survey sheets, (see Table 1) observations during the presentations and interviews with the students.

Participants

For the observation and interview study, the researcher selected an ESL class which included 16 female and 14 male students from China whose ages range from 17 to 30. Participants majored in Accounting, Economics, Computer Science, Marketing and Biology, with degrees from undergraduate to graduate study at Marietta College. All 30 students completed at least 6 years of English study in China and participated in at least 4 months of ESL class in the United States. All the students from China in this class were asked to fill out the survey sheet, and all turned in the survey sheet. The researcher considered that the more variety of students who chose to participate, the more reliability will be regarded.
Table 1. Demographic data for students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>How much your major requires you to speak English (low 1—High 5)</th>
<th>How often you speak English daily (none 1—very often 5)</th>
<th>Anxiety level when giving presentation (low 1—high 5)</th>
<th>What activities do you think can help you improve speaking English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Peer Partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>ESL class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pop music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Peer Partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Field trip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>ESL class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Pop music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Peer Partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pop music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>ESL class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Movie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Peer Partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>ESL class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Community activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Peer Partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Community activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>undecided</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Peer Partner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Material:

The survey sheet (see Appendix B) contains fourteen questions that were used to collect the data from the students’ point of view about how English as a second language affected students in giving presentations to the class in the United States. The twelve questions were scored on a five point Likert scale (i.e., 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree) and also contained multiple choice questions. Instead of using the short answer questions, the researcher used this style of questionnaire to reduce the time that Chinese students have to face in providing information. The surveys and questionnaires used made it easier for students to fill out who may be struggling with language skills. In order to ensure the reliability of this survey, the researcher prepared the anonymous survey. The researcher also let the students fill out the survey after class without any supervision.

Procedure

The research procedure included three parts: making and collecting the survey sheet (stated above), observation during the presentation, and interviews with the students. The data was then entered into Excel to make graphs.

The purpose of the interviews with the students was to obtain the information about the students’ experiences of giving presentations in front of the class and their learning strategies to overcome the deficiency of their speaking skills.

The purpose of class observation was for the researcher to notice English speaking skills of students during presentations in the classroom and to closely watch
the students’ performance and behaviors related to anxiety level due to English being a second language.

For the observation, the researcher attended ESL class on the days that students gave oral presentations. The purpose of this oral presentation was to inform their audience about different viewpoints on a controversial topic. Thirty of the Chinese students chose topics that were related to China, because they liked to construct meaning based on their existing knowledge and experiences; the closer the topics match with their prior knowledge, the more accurately and less anxious students will perform during the presentation.

The length of the presentations was around 5-7 minutes and each student had at least one visual aid. The students were not allowed to have more than two note cards to avoid reading the information while presenting, and could not stand behind the desk. The information about the topic that students collected was from magazines, journals, articles, books, or interviews of other students. See Table 2 and figure 2 for notes from these observations.
Table 2: Result from class observation (1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confidence level</th>
<th>Body language</th>
<th>Visual aid</th>
<th>Not frequently look notes</th>
<th>Follow time requirement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Poor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Result from class observation (1)
Throughout the observation of the class, the researcher wrote down notes and collected data about the students’ performance during the presentations (see Table 3 and Figure 3).

1) Content (whether there is interesting information that can attract audiences’ attention). The researcher paid attention to the cultural content influence of students who gave a presentation.

2) Delivery (how comfortable and confident students appeared in front of the audience) was measured.

3) Speaking rate, fluency, volume, pulse, and pronunciation were measured.

4) Appropriate use of grammar and vocabulary were measured.

5) Communication effectiveness: was the presentation well organized and well developed, and did the speaker cue the listener to the organization? (‘‘First of all’, ‘In contrast’, ‘In conclusion’, ‘Above all’, etc.).
Table 3: Results from the class observation (2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Delivery</th>
<th>Speaking rate</th>
<th>Grammar</th>
<th>Communication effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very poor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: Results from the class observation (2)
Table 4: Students Attitudes and Perception:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>5 (high)</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1 (low)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of speaking English (daily)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much your major requires you to speak English?</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your anxiety level when giving presentation?</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How negative attitudes affect you during presentation?</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think there is a performance difference between practicing alone or in front of class?</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think that ESL class helped you to improve your English?</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5: Description of why students from China feel anxious giving presentations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question</th>
<th>Key word</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the most</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficult part that</td>
<td>Fear of negative evaluation</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>makes you feel</td>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anxiety during the</td>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>presentation?</td>
<td>Accents</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5: Description of why students from China feel anxious giving presentations
Table 6: Evaluation of your own performance (Poor 1---Excellent 5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Rate</th>
<th>Fluency</th>
<th>Efficiency</th>
<th>Not depend on memory</th>
<th>Flexibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very poor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6: Evaluation of your own performance
Table 7: How do you want your ESL teacher help you to improve speaking skills?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assign peer/group work</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss interesting topic</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide video</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field trip</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation practice</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach speech techniques</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7: How do you want your ESL teacher help you to improve speaking skills?
Potential ethic issues

In order to be a professional research data collector, the researcher gave the freedom to the students before their presentation to choose whether or not they would fill the survey and allow the researcher to observe their performance during presentations. The researcher also kept the confidentiality from other people. The information and data that the researcher collected was used for the research paper only. The researcher did not use this information for any other purpose and the information was destroyed after the research paper was done. The research also used first person language on the research, and the researcher was aware of the role in the study in a way that honors and respects the participants.

Discussion:

The findings of this research revealed that students from China need to improve their speaking skill in their academic study in the United States because English is their second language. Most of the students realized that in order to overcome their weakness, they found out that accent and fear of negative evaluation lower their performance.

From the self evaluation form and preferred teaching strategies methods, the researcher found out that students from China already noticed and understood the importance of English speaking skills and also realized that they need teacher and self-helped improvement. They were also highly motivated to use any source and opportunities to improve their speaking skills. The analysis of data obtained from the learning strategy questionnaire and class observation revealed that the speaking
strategies ESL students frequently used were paying attention when they gave presentations in front of the class.

The results of the class observation showed that the majority of the students had difficulties in giving presentations in front of the class. The data indicated that the average level of oral presentation and English speaking skills were between average and poor. The students from China still had a long time to improve their speaking skills and required effort and encouragement.

The research also indicated that, in the English as a Second Language class, students’ performances while giving presentations in front of the class were affected by content, pronunciation, grammar, accents and personality. The characteristics of poor performance include more anxiety and frustration, less confidence, and even communication apprehension. The reason for all of those is due to the different language background, culture, teaching method, and accent.

The results of the study support the hypothesis that there were performance differences if the students felt anxiety or frustration when speaking English as a second language in front of class. The cause of these anxiety included different and unfamiliar content, fear of negative evaluation, grammar and pronunciation problems, and accent since the students were exposed to the English environment too late and infrequency.

Of all 30 students, only 2 students (7%) felt relaxed and comfortable during their presentation. Twelve of the students (40%) felt that if they had the confidence because they practiced before the presentation and use English in daily life, they could
overcome those anxieties. Sixteen of the students (53%) felt uncomfortable and frustrated during the presentation no matter how hard they tried and practiced.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion, students from China are not prepared well for effective communications to present themselves with or in front of American peers and professors due to speaking English as a second language. Speaking skills compared to other 3 skills of listening, reading, and writing were the most difficult skills to improve and it took time and effort for both ESL teachers and students from China. Speaking skills were also the most important skills that needed to be used in the classroom and daily life. The bright point of this was that students from China already realized their weakness and required both ESL teacher and themselves to explore more in English-speaking environments such as watching videos, listening to tapes and joining peer partner group and being involved in the community activity. Through all of these activities, the students still felt uncomfortable and had difficulty during the presentation, but they overcame anxiety and became more relaxed afterwards.
REFERENCE


McDonald, D (1995) Improving Student Learning with Group Assignments. Lake Superior State University


Rubin, J. (1975). What the “good language learner” can teach us. TESOL Quarterly. 9, 41-51.


APPENDICES A

Figure 1. Chinese students enrolled in institutions of higher education in the United States.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics
APPENDICES B

Survey Sheet

Age: _______  Sex: ___________  Major: __________

Status (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, graduate students)

Years of study at Marietta College _________

1. How many years have you been speaking English?
   6+  8+  10+  12+

2. How often do you speak English everyday?
   Very often  often  some  little  none

3. What is the anxiety level when you giving presentation in front of the class
   high  low
   The scale is from:  5  4  3  2  1

4. What is the most difficult English problem that makes you feel anxious during the presentation?
   Content  pronunciation  grammar  accents  personality

5. What is the most difficult speech problem that makes you feel anxiety during the presentation?
   Personal performance  fear of negative evaluation  fear of not being perfect

6. Do you feel better if ______ students around?
   A lot  some  few  does not matter
7. How much does your major require you to speak English?
Very much    much    normal    little    none

8. What is your perception of listeners’ attitudes toward your speaking skills?
Very good    good    average    poor    very poor

9. How do listeners’ attitudes affect you while giving a presentation?
Very much    much    normal    little    none

10. Do you think that the ESL class is helpful for your presentation skills?
Strongly agree    agree    neutral    disagree    strongly disagree

11. What is your overall GPA
4-3.5    3.5-3    3-2.5    2.5-2    below 2

12. What is your expectation for a grade in this class?
A    B    C    D    F

13. Do you think there is a performance difference between you practices alone or giving a presentation in front of class?
Very different    different    some    same    very same

14. Choose one of each pair
Rate of speech:    medium    or    slow
fluent    or    not fluent
efficient    or    inefficient
effortless    or    requires effort
not limited by short-term memory    or    limited by short-term memory
flexible    or    inflexible