Current Research Projects – Wei-Li Hsu  
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Instruction of Reading Strategies in an Intermediate Chinese Class

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Many studies have supported the positive correlation between strategy-use and reading comprehension. However, there have been few studies investigating the effectiveness of strategy instruction. Participants of this study received a semester-long strategy-instruction focusing on reading comprehension in Chinese. Instruction includes strategies for skimming, focusing on more important information, guessing unknown words based on morphological and syntactical cues, and identifying signal words which indicate textual relations.

There will be two groups of participants, one as the experimental group receiving strategy-instruction, and the other is the control group receiving no strategy instruction. The students will be tested at the beginning and at the end of a semester. Four articles with similar difficulty and topics will used to assess participants’ comprehension quality, and the comprehension quality will be examined via either think-aloud protocol or eye-track method.

The eye-tracking method will monitor participants reading patterns of reading titles and pictures, and fixations on more content words. The think-aloud protocol will monitor participants’ strategies for scanning keywords, reading selectively, summarizing main ideas for each paragraph, and using morphological and syntactic cues for guessing unknown words.

Incorporating Democratic Assessment in a Chinese Language Class

Wei-Li Hsu (CLIC)

Critical pedagogy has supported the idea of a negotiated syllabus to empower and motivate students. Democratic assessment, as a related area of critical pedagogy, advocates that students need to play a more active role in test development (Shohamy, 2001). Democratic assessment proposes that by inviting students’ input, assessments are more likely to target skills that students really care for and need, and the negotiation process would generate positive washback and higher motivation. Although the use of democratic assessment would create more equal relationships between language instructors and students, instructors often face a practical dilemma of incorporating students’ voices while securing the test content at the same time.

This study will explore a way to test students’ oral ability on a topic chosen by them. During the oral test, the students will be paired with a classmate. At the beginning, the grading rubric and two sample prompts for paired-discussion will be explained to the students. Later, each pair will have five minutes to decide on the test topic, which they need to maintain a five-minute long conversation. After the discussion, each pair will have five-minutes to prepare for
the oral test. During the preparation, students will not be allowed to discuss the topic with each other; and the whole process, from deciding the topic, test preparation, and the actual test responses will be recorded. Student’s grades will be decided based on their topic-discussion (50%) and the actual test performance (50%). Students’ responses to the topic-discussion and the actual test will be separately graded and compared. The grading categories will include language use, active listenership, turn-organization, topic development and expansion, and opening and closing a conversation.

**Examine Linguistic Landscape of Chinatown as a Student Project in a Chinese Heritage Classroom**

Wei-Li Hsu (CLIC)

In comparison to typical foreign language learners, heritage language learners have more access to local communities. These local communities provide opportunities not only for learning the target language but also for examining multilingualism by the community members. Linguistic landscape (LL) studies how multilingual texts are used in public spaces to unveil how different languages and their speakers are perceived in the society (Shohamy, 2009). The texts include “public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings” (Landry and Bourhis, 1997, p. 25).

This classroom-project requires students to use Google Earth or other webpages to compare LL of different Chinatowns. Students need to compare three themes: the use of Mandarin Chinese (both Simplified and Traditional Chinese), of other Chinese dialects, English, and other languages, such as Vietnamese. To conclude the project, students are required to describe the relationships between the language uses and the language users in terms of nationality, ethnicity, religion, social-economic status.

At the end of this project, students should be able to understand that, contrary to a popular myth, the Chinese community is not a monolithic unity. Texts in Simplified, Traditional, and other dialects of Chinese can be found in many Chinatowns. Moreover, students will value the rich linguistic resources of Chinatown’s Chinese dialects to better understand the users of these Chinese varieties. Furthermore, they will be more sensitive to the differences among Chinese dialects and utilize their home dialects to learn Mandarin Chinese and vice versa.

**A Comparison of Students’ Performance in Face-to-Face and Virtual Reality Oral Tests**

Jayoung Song (CLIC) and Wei-Li Hsu (CLIC)

For the past decades, computer technology has been increasingly used in all aspects of language testing, including test design and development, test administration, scoring, and analysis in order to accurately measure one’s second language speaking ability (Chapelle & Douglas, 2006). Although assessing oral language proficiency via computers or other forms of multimedia technology has been a popular trend in the field of language testing, it has some
limitations. Some studies have found that semi-direct interviews such as tape-mediated interview (e.g., SOPI) elicit different language functions and skills (Shohamy, 1994; van Lier, 1989). More importantly, talking to the computer or tape-recorder does not measure interactional competence, that is, how a person manages a conversation in real contexts.

In light of these issues, it seems timely to develop an interactive speaking assessment, in which test takers can discuss topics with each other using a computer (Ockey, 2009). One of the possible platforms could be a Virtual Reality (VR) setup, which provides immersive environment thus increasing the authenticity of the situation (Huang, Rauch, & Liaw, 2010; Ong & Mannan, 2004). The purpose of the present study is to explore if a VR environment could be a suitable platform for second language assessment. It specifically compares students’ performance in a VR oral test and a face-to-face oral test. A total of 25 KFL students enrolled in a private institution in the southwestern part of the United States participated in the study. The participants took two sets of face-to-face and VR tests after receiving training in the VR Data was drawn from students’ test scores, a survey asking their perceptions towards the two testing modes, conversational analysis of their speaking test scripts, and interviews. First, the results showed statistically significant differences between the two modes in terms of oral test scores (F (1, 46) = 5.386, p < 0.05, partial eta-squared = 0.105). Among the seven scoring categories, turn-taking showed the largest difference between the two modes and the difference was clearer in the final exam than in the midterm exam. Second, students significantly preferred the face-to-face mode to the VR mode (F (1, 47) = 9.945, p < 0.05, partial eta-squared = 0.175). The largest difference among the 11 questions was in regard to easiness to take turns. Third, conversation analysis suggests that in the face-to-face mode, students showed more frequent turn-taking, more active listenership, and more successful co-construction.