Beyond Traditional Teaching: Becoming a Communicative Language Teacher

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BEYOND TRADITIONAL TEACHING: ECOMING A COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHER

by

Dora Brunson

A portfolio submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah
2014
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ABSTRACT

Beyond Traditional Teaching: Becoming a Communicative Language Teacher

by

Dora Brunson

Master of Second Language Teaching
Utah State University, 2014

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Department: Languages, Philosophy, and Communication Studies

This portfolio is a collection of the author's beliefs and concepts learned at the MSLT program about teaching second and foreign languages. This portfolio includes a teaching philosophy, three artifacts, two annotated bibliographies, reflecting the author's understanding and ideas regarding the role of teachers and students in the classroom as well as factors which affect second language acquisition. The teaching philosophy emphasizes how teachers provide students tools for real-life challenges by creating a contextualized learning environment and filling up the classroom with comprehensible input and target language through task-based activities to engage learning in the classroom. In addition, teachers are to provide stress-free, respectful and culture-rich environment for students to learn. Such learning environments motivate and enable students to know how, when and why to say what to whom (ACTFL, 2015).

(93 pages)
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Second, I want to thank my classmates in the MSLT program. I thank them for their friendship and the inspiration they give me. I have enjoyed the time we spent together in studying, discussions, and activities. Each of them has brought different cultures and experiences to enrich the MSLT program. I am honored and grateful that they are a part of my MSLT journey.

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Lastly, I want to dedicate this portfolio to my mother who passed away two years ago. She was wise and generous. She provided the opportunities for me to advance my education even though it was not popular for girls to continue higher education at that time. She showed me gender equality, believing men and women should receive equal opportunity for education as long as they are capable. She understood the value of education through her own experiences of harassment and embarrassment and realized what education can bring to life. She taught me how to be a good person, student, worker, wife, and mother. I am who I am because of her.
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**Introduction**

Growing up in Taiwan, learning English was just a tool to get me ahead in its education system. The traditional approach of language teaching does not accomplish the universal goal of language learners, to be able to communicate with others. The MSLT program has enlightened me about the new approaches in language learning, as well as theories of second language acquisition.

This portfolio describes my journal of becoming a language teacher. It is a collection of my learning and teaching experiences for the past four years studying at the MSLT program. It includes a teaching philosophy, three artifacts, and two annotated bibliography, reflecting my understanding and ideas regarding the role of teachers and students in the classroom as well as factors which affect second language acquisition. The two annotated bibliographies summarize and reflect on the books, journals, web sites, and periodicals I have read. Teachers' role has shifted from authoritative controllers to facilitator and architects who place students' needs first by designing communicative lessons and curriculum. Communicative language teaching is the new approach emphasizes which how learners acquire the language skills through interaction: negotiation of meaning, expression and interpretation. When students' objective is to be able to communicate with others, teachers should create a contextualized classroom through task-based activities and make it possible for students to achieve their goal in target language by knowing how and when to say what to whom.
TEACHING PHILOSOPHY
When I was 3 years old, I went to a preschool sponsored by the Catholic Church. My teacher, a nun, taught me how to behave inside and outside the classroom. She taught me things I did not know. I remember telling my parents after I finished preschool: “I want to be a nun when I grow up”. They laughed at me and told me that I did not mean what I said. Truthfully, I did not want to be a nun. I wanted to be the character the nun represented- a teacher, nice and kind. The thought of being a teacher has been embedded in my mind since then.

I grew up in the Chinese culture, where girls are not traditionally allowed or encouraged to pursue higher education. Boys represent valuable, productive assets for a family while girls represent the depletion of resources. Most Chinese families will not invest too much time and money on their daughters for this reason. Luckily my wise mother could see the benefits of education and encouraged me to study hard and pursue higher education. She knew education is the key to a successful and happy life. Moreover, through my own experience of schooling, I knew that teachers are the key in inspiring students to pursue the next level of success. Teachers set examples for students to follow, encourage students when they are not motivated, and show the path and help students to achieve their goals. This is why I would like to become a teacher and I know that kind of experience is rewarding because I have experienced it.

When I first learned English, I was taught in the grammar-translation method and the audio-lingual approach, especially the latter. I learned the language from textbooks designed for rote memorization, scripted conversation, and structural drills. I then came...
to America in 1992, but was unable to communicate in daily activities. I was able to read and write, but was unable to understand what I heard. It seemed people spoke so fast, it was difficult to understand or formulate a response. When I interacted with people for business or personal reasons, I would try to remember the drills I learned in Taiwan and match the answers I was taught from the past to form a sentence. That was not very effective and didn't work well. It took me a period of six months to feel comfortable enough to communicate with others. I became frustrated.

To improve my English skills in speaking and listening, I had decided, without asking help from my Chinese friends, to maximize opportunities to practice English through daily activities: shopping for groceries, buying a movie ticket, purchasing car insurance, and visiting a doctor. From time to time, I had anxiety, and was worried people were unable to understand me, that my pronunciation was incorrect, and I used the wrong words. But I told myself the reason I came to the U.S. to participate in the surroundings. Therefore, I opened my mouth and asked. The more I asked, the more I learned. Through daily interaction in an immersion environment, I progressed and felt comfortable with communication in English.

I tutored middle and high school students English when I was a college student. This teaching experience was especially fulfilling to me, given the opportunity to relate my own learning experience and apply it in instruction. Twenty years ago, after I finished my 2nd Bachelor degree at Utah State University, I returned to Taiwan. My nephew was preparing for the high school entrance examination, which included an English portion. I was able to help him focus on the relationship between phonics and letters instead of memorizing each individual English vocabulary. He made a discovery
of the relationship by himself, what I did for him was scaffolding. In addition, it was
gratifying that he received a very high score on the English test. I simplified the task,
keeping him motivated and in pursuit of his goal. Our interaction was in a stress-free and
relaxed environment. He made the connection between our interaction and previous
knowledge all by himself. That transformation of his comprehension was a great reward
for me. Even though I pursued various types of employment over the years, mostly in the
field of accounting, teaching always remained a dream. When the opportunity presented
itself, I enrolled in the MSLT program and started the journey of becoming a language
teacher.
Professional Environment

When learning English in Taiwan, where I grew up, I experienced traditional language instruction. My goal was to obtain a high score and pass the entrance examination for university by rote memorizations and drill practices. It was an educational, but impractical journey: I could read but was not able to communicate in English. This learning experience provided me with an in-depth understanding of second language learning for a specific purpose.

When I first joined the MSLT program, I was thinking about returning to Taiwan to teach English to beginners age 13 and up after I retire from Utah State University. I would like to incorporate my experience with the training of second language teaching from the MSLT program to facilitate an engaging and meaningful environment, helping Taiwanese learners of English not only to obtain real-life communicative skills that they can use in interactions in English, but also to achieve a high score on their examinations. I would like to contribute my knowledge and skills to make learning English an enjoyable learning process either in a regular school setting or at a private institute.

After starting my journey in the MSLT program, I realized I have more options than I first thought. First, I could teach Chinese in an English-speaking country to university students. Those who are interested in learning Chinese while attending a university tend to have a strong desire to gain the skill. My goal for them is that they will be able to confidently communicate with others in Chinese in real life situations. Secondly, I could teach Chinese in a Dual Language Immersion program. According to a
study from the Pennsylvania State University, learning another language not only increases brain function in recognizing, negotiating meaning and communicating in different languages but also builds the skills of multitasking. Additionally, it also provides different perspectives and improves decision-making skills. "The Dual Language Immersion program offers a rich bilingual experience for young learners when their minds are developmentally best able to acquire a second language" (Utah State Office of Education, 2014). I enjoy working with children of elementary school age whose minds are like sponges, ready to soak up rich and diverse knowledge. Among the 118 schools in Fiscal year 2014-2015 participating Dual Language Immersion in Utah, 33 are Chinese Dual Language Immersion programs. As a Dual Language Immersion teacher, I would be able to introduce an integrated, wide-ranging, and diverse curriculum to young learners. Hopefully through their early participation in an immersion program, they will benefit not only by gaining competitive language skills but also by expanding their world views, understanding the customs and culture of others, and becoming critical thinkers in our society.

Most of all, I want to introduce language learners to authentic American and Chinese cultures. People often misunderstand each other due to a lack of cross-cultural awareness. I want to take the opportunity to bridge the gap between cultures. No matter which professional environment I am in, my objective of language teaching will stay on facilitating a comfortable, respectful, and culture-rich environment for learners, so they are able to use the target language for real-life interactions.
Personal Teaching Philosophy

My personal teaching philosophy reflects the beliefs and perspectives I have gained from my learning and teaching experiences before and during the MSLT program, as well as observations throughout the course of my life. I recognize being a teacher is the same as being a mother -- without the pregnancy. Mothers identify children's needs and seek their best interests, creating a contextualized environment and providing opportunities to foster learning. They teach their children beliefs and values, but at the same time respect others' thoughts and morals. They show their children how to do house tasks and then assign them to those chores to improve their life skills. Mothers teach and nurture their children to independency, and so do teachers, especially language teachers.

Being a mother, I want two things for my child: self-reliance and happiness in life. As a language teacher, I want these two things for my students as well: that they are able to function using the target language, and the process and experience of their language learning is enjoyable. To achieve these goals, I have to combine different methods of language instruction, such as target language use in the classroom, comprehensible input, and task-based activities so students are prepared and equipped to use the language as tools to interact with people and accomplish life tasks. I also have to create a comfortable and culture-rich learning environment so that students are motivated and enjoy the learning process of knowing how and what to communicate.
Teaching provides tools for real life challenges

When I first arrived in the United States, I was not able to communicate in English. I did not know what kind of account I opened at Zions Bank until 5 years later—it was a checking account—nor could I understand what today's special was at the restaurant, and how much it would cost me. I was taught with the traditional approach which utilized sentence drills and memorization of grammar rules to learn English. In retrospect, I wish I would have had a contextualized learning environment so I could have practiced communication in English for real-life situations.

Teachers practicing the traditional approach perceive themselves as the authority and the central figure of the classroom. The focus is on them because teachers see themselves as the experts who transmit knowledge to students. Therefore, they assume all responsibility in the classroom, thinking that by improving their instruction, they will improve students' learning. The obvious problem with the traditional teacher-centered approach is that it does not provide students opportunities to communicate using the target language, which is an essential part of learning a new language.

Research shows students' first goal in studying a language is to be able to speak the language and communicate with others (Akbari, 2008; Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mandell, 2003). For this purpose, the communicative language teaching approach is a more effective method for language teaching for students than the traditional approach (Lee & VanPatten, 2003). A communicative approach shifts the focus from teachers to learners, as well as changing the roles of teachers and students in the classroom. Teachers are no longer the lecturers, they become the architects and designers. The classroom is no longer a teacher-centered classroom; it is a student-centered classroom.
which allows students to interact with other students. Teachers can create such a contextualized learning environment by using the target language, providing comprehensible input, and planning real-life, interactive activities.

Whether trivial or significant, input is essential in language learning, for it is language with communicative information. Target language use in the classroom provides input for the language learners to hear and read, so that they can try to interpret what is being conveyed. ACTFL guidelines (2012) recommend that the target language be used by the educators and their students in the classroom 90%+ of the time. Teachers should design activities to engage students in interaction in the target language. Students carry out the activities using the target language, while in the meantime, the instructor can monitor and identify whether students comprehend the meaning of instruction.

Input is important, however. And it has to be comprehensible. This means "the learner must be able to understand most of what the speaker (or writer) is saying" (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 26). Language acquisition will not happen if the input is not comprehensible. A good example is by looking at those immigrants who have been living in the United States for years, surrounded by input, yet they are unable to communicate well in English. Krashen (1982) asserts that comprehensible input causes acquisition, thus claiming that students acquire language skills through the process of understanding the message provided to them -- the input given. To make input comprehensible, Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, and Mandell (2001, adapting from Hatch, 1983) recommend that instructors employ a slower rate of speech, use high frequency vocabulary and simple syntax, incorporate repetition, and offer longer pauses. In addition, comprehensible input must be meaning bearing (Lee & VanPatten, 2003), so
that students will understand better and be able to communicate in real-life settings. Many items can be used to bring meaningful content to students, such as authentic texts, including magazines, newspaper articles, poems, audio recordings, videotapes, and radio programs. With these, students have the opportunity to see and hear real language that serves a purpose (Lee & VanPatten, 2003).

Given that students' first goal is to be able to speak the language, producing the target language is an important component of language acquisition. Task-based activities offer students opportunities to carry out real-life scenarios and produce output in the target language through meaningful interaction. Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, and Mandell (2011) state that "task-based instruction is learner centered in that successful completion of a task is only possible as a result of student-to-student interaction" (p. 76). Task-based activities demand target language communication, which meet the goals of communicative language teaching and the standards for foreign language learning: "to teach students to express themselves, understand others, and request clarification or express lack of comprehension to others -- all in [the target language]" (Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mandell, 2003, p. 62). I believe that when teachers relinquish their authority and create a learner-centered classroom by providing a contextualized learning environment which is full of comprehensible input in the target language and in which students carry out real-life, task-based activities, students will develop the ability to speak the language.
Teaching facilitates a comfortable and culture-rich environment to learn

As Peregoy and Boyle (2008) point out, "only when [new] students become comfortably integrated into your classroom's social and academic routines will optimal second language acquisition and academic learning occur" (p.15). There are many ways to make students feel comfortable in the classroom, and teachers can help by becoming aware of their students' background, personal histories and cultures, and to understand their feelings, frustrations, hopes, and aspirations. Every human has a need to belong, including students. Learners learn best when they feel they are a part of a community (Bartolome, 1994; Kasun, 2013; Saavedra, 2011) in which they are accepted and encouraged no matter what they say or do. However, if students experience the impatience of teachers or interlocutors, are unable to make themselves understood or are constantly corrected, language anxiety occurs.

Being a second language learner myself, I have experienced and now understand the causes of language anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. I am always worried if my pronunciation is correct? Did I say it right? What if I don't understand what others are saying? Will they judge me? Do they think I am dumb? According to Krashen (1985a, 1985b), anxiety inhibits the learner's ability to process incoming language and short-circuits the process of acquisition. When anxiety arises, it weakens cognitive function. The less anxiety a student encounters, the more course content the student will recall. Students who experience anxiety may not be able to show what they have learned. In fact, von Wörde (2003) finds that the role of the teacher is paramount in alleviating anxiety, more vital perhaps than a particular methodology. Teachers who provide a supportive and understanding environment, who
employ nonthreatening teaching methods, and who use appealing and relevant topics enhance the language learning experience.

Teachers should also take into account that "people's behavior combines both cultural and individual difference" (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008, p. 15) and embrace the cultures and subcultures that students bring into the classroom. Culture is the beliefs and values practiced by a group of people (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004; Moran, 2001). It varies from region to region, country to country. Age, gender, social status, occupation, wealth, and power affect the language used in a particular culture. To correctly interpret the intended meaning of conversations requires understanding of the culture values of the speakers. It goes without saying, therefore, that teaching pragmatics is important. If learners are not aware of the pragmatics of the target language, they may not respond to the true intention of conversations which can cause misunderstanding. Teachers can help learners understand why and when certain words or phrases are used. For example, the speech act of refusal in Chinese culture involves face and politeness. Chinese people will not say "no" directly to a speaker's face. The expression of "maybe" represents "no" in an extremely polite way.

Students are able to connect with others from different cultures instantaneously today because of the modern communications technology. It is critical for learners of a second language to understand and learn the pragmatics of the target language to understand the true meaning behind linguistic expressions. Teachers should incorporate culture-specific materials to increase students' understanding about how and what people do in that culture so students can engage in successful interactions. They should use the technology available to strategically create an effective and culturally rich learning
environment by obtaining materials, both written and oral, created by fluent speakers of the target language for the people of the target language. Teachers should create opportunities and encourage students to practice the target language with native speakers. These authentic learning materials and encounters will help address many of the misunderstandings between cultures, resulting in a better understanding of cultural differences.

Conclusion

Education is the door to a better life, both mentally and monetarily. Teachers play an enormous role in the learning process. I want to be that person who facilitates the path for students. I will motivate students, make learning enjoyable by using multimedia and visual aids, pay attention to students' personalities, understand the brain functions related to learning, provide authentic texts, help students connect diverse cultural aspects, and use interactive group or pair activities.

I was the product of old-school language learning, taught in the grammar-translation method and audio-lingual approach. Even though I studied English for 15 years in Taiwan, I was not able to communicate orally when I arrived in the U.S. I did not have confidence about my language ability. From the Master of Second Language Teaching program, I have learned a better instructional approach, communicative language teaching, a method that incorporates contextualized input, output, and interaction in the language learning process to reach communicative goals (Shrum & Glisan 2010). Students will develop their proficiency through task-based activities by working and interacting with other students to expand their skills and understanding of
the language. Through personal experience, I have found task-based activities, such as interviews and information gap activities, to be effective ways to guide students' learning. Whether working in pairs or with small group, students use learned words and phrases to get information, share information as well as agree and disagree. These activities present the most real-life like situations for students to practice using the target language. By incorporating all the principles I have learned from the MSLT program, I will make sure students will use the language not only in the classroom but especially outside the classroom.
Professional Development through Teaching Observations

Teaching is a complicated duty involving many skills and techniques which include creating a contextualized learning environment, designing lessons, and managing class time. Teachers need to make sure they are able to complete the course and meet academic requirements, to motivate students and keep them focused, and to assess students' progress and ensure that they understand the learned materials. Many tasks happen simultaneously in the classroom, and one way for teachers to become more effective and accomplish their tasks successfully is through teaching observations. Teaching observations are a form of professional development. They provide opportunities for teachers to improve teaching practices by learning from colleagues. It is not used to judge teachers, but a tool to reflect on their own teaching and serve as a means for professional growth. Luckily, I have had many opportunities to observe classes in Chinese, Spanish, and English in which I have greatly benefited.

Target language use is considered to be vital for the second/foreign language acquisition. ACFTL guidelines (2010) recommend that the target language are used by the educators and their students in the classroom 90%+ of the time. All classes I observed used target language 90%+ of the time in the classroom. However, the key difference is who uses the target language in the classroom. In a Spanish first-year class, the teacher understood the importance of target language use and used the target language the entire class period, unfortunately there was a lack of target language use by the students. Students need comprehensible input to internalize the language provided to them in order to produce output.
I observed such comprehensible input in a first-grade classroom of a Chinese immersion program. The classroom was colorful and full of pictures and photos in Chinese vocabulary. Students moved from one section to another for different activities. Section by section, there were objects, materials, and word strips in Chinese.

I always wondered how to have significant, meaningful communication while teaching low level or the first year foreign language students. By observing a Chinese DLI classroom, I found out it is the activities designed by the instructors who engage students in the activities and compel them to produce output in the target language. Only when students participate in the learning process within the classroom will they gain the confidence to use it in the real world.

One of the observations I found interesting for a lower level English class was the vocabulary activity. The activity was to pick 5 words the students wanted to know, spell it out on the paper, write down the meaning in their native language, locate the word in the dictionary, write down the English definition, and then make a sentence using the word. I was momentarily stunned when the teacher asked students to use their native language for the translation. But I quickly realized the students were at a lower speaking/writing level and the teacher needed to have students understand the words. By doing this, students could better comprehend the meaning of words based on what they already knew, while embracing their native language and simultaneously empowering themselves in learning English.

Another observation I had was of an ESL instructor who speaks the students' native language, Spanish. He was eager to help students understand words and concepts, and started to use Spanish to explain the specific concepts which led to communication in
Spanish between him and his students. Besides reducing students' opportunities to hear the target language and causing the students' dependence on L1, it was not fair to the learners who do not understand Spanish.

Most of the classes I have observed have been student-centered. Occasionally, the format has slipped to a teacher-centered classroom, especially in a content-based class. At the beginning of the class, the teacher asked volunteers to go through flash cards, which contained 24 questions of the standard citizenship oral test, with students. Surprisingly, all students had studied the questions and answered them correctly. Afterwards, the teacher started the lesson by going through page after page, using the powerpoint slides with photos to finish the lesson. Then she asked the students to finish the worksheet located at the end of each lesson.

I did not see any examples of engaging methods used in the citizenship class, just lectures and worksheet exercises. However, this class experience made me think about "motivation". The students who signed up for this class are those who would like to obtain their U.S. citizenship. They are highly motivated. The class is only reinforcement class to achieve their goal, which is also the goal of the instructor. They study hard, they memorize the answers, and they come to class to learn the rest of the test questions. Teachers do not have to force the students to study for the test. Students are motivated because it costs each of them $680 to apply for the citizen test. This makes me think how I can facilitate a learning environment with such high motivation and dedication for my language class. I realize that the choice of learning materials is critical to learners. Teachers need to offer a curriculum which is authentic and meaningful to the students, so the learning process is motivating and beneficial. The textbook for the citizenship class
is authentic, containing all questions that the immigration officer might ask in one textbook, but I wonder if it is meaningful to students. Will they remember the 13 colonies? Do they know the true meaning when they say the Pledge of Allegiance? I believe it all depends on the course goal and individual goal which is different from that of regular language classes.

I am grateful I had the opportunity to observe Dr. Sung's Chinese class for a semester. It gave me ideas on how to structure the lessons with activities that are meaningful and engaging. I am thankful for the MSLT program which has opened my eyes to a new instructional approach, Communicative Language Teaching. I appreciate the opportunity of teaching observations, through which I can compare theories to classroom practice. I will continue to observe other teachers to make me a better language teacher.
Self-Assessment of Teaching

This video was taped in the last semester of my MSLT program. I was a substitute for Chinese 2010 teaching a lesson about the weather. The class was 50 minutes long and with objectives that 1) Students would be able to communicate with others about weather conditions in Chinese, 2) Students would be able to give information about the weather in Chinese, 3) Students would understand when people tell them what the weather is like in Chinese, and 4) Students would be able to read about weather conditions written in Chinese. This class was comprised of three sections of activities: warm up, new vocabulary, and an information gap activity. Students practiced their communicative skills, reading/writing, speaking, and listening through various activities under my instruction.

Prior to the MSLT program, I did not know what communicative language teaching was. After studying in the MSLT program, I understand the importance of a contextualized learning environment in increasing students' language ability. I saw the benefits of a student-centered classroom with task-based activities, as well as experienced the challenges in implementing the theories into practice. Recognizing the significant impact of the contextualized environment, I instructed the class with 95%+ in the target language, which was both a complex concept to comprehend and a difficult task for me to execute at the beginning of my MSLT program. I was taught in the "traditional translation and audio-lingual" method, where teachers taught in the native language and focused on the detailed instruction of grammar to explain the target language structures. But now I have learned many practices and techniques that can be applied to explain the
abstract meaning in the target language and add to students' understanding. I can utilize pictures and the exercise of Total Physical Response (TPR) to assist students' comprehension of meaning. I can also provide several demonstrations of how to use the characters and words related to their own culture, background knowledge, and real-life experiences. I can use repetition at a slower speed so students can remember and understand the characters. Most of all, I can create a stress-free, comfortable, and energetic learning environment to promote language learning.

After the class, I felt confident that I provided a comfortable learning environment with communicative activities. Many students came to express their gratitude after this class and said they liked it. Even though I was energetic and enthusiastic in the classroom, I knew I could make changes and improvements in what I did in the classroom, especially after reviewing the video and feedback from my observer.

First, I should utilize the white board more. Instead of standing in the front of the class explaining the meaning of words and characters, I could write them on the white board to catch students' attention and increase visual exposure. I should also walk around to evaluate students' knowledge of pinyin and characters for informal assessments. Secondly, I should model the activity completely and clearly before giving the handout. Distributing the handout before explaining how to perform the activity distracted students. As soon as students received the handout, they were anxious to study the activity and could not wait to start. Their attention shifted to the disclosure instead of paying attention to the directions, which required more time for this activity due to the explanation needed for each group. Students cannot carry out the task efficiently if a complete and clear explanation is not given.
Last, I should be careful and pay attention to a "pair" issue. How to pair up students should be taken into consideration when designing the pair work activity. I had 13 students today. I should plan ahead and pull the highest performing student to be my assistant if I cannot pair each student. When I worked with the student who needed a partner, I missed the opportunity to observe and evaluate other groups.

The process of self-observation and self-evaluation made me look at my practice today in depth. Before the lesson, I had practiced the sequence of lesson in my head several time before the class. Whenever I made a change, I ran it through again. However, I did not write it down. Sometimes, I missed a step or activity the classroom because of distractions and time pressure. I should prepare a check list of the essential elements and step by step instruction to help me improve as a teacher.
The Effects of Comprehensible Input, Motivation, and Affective Filter in Second Language Acquisition
Introduction

Many factors influence the outcome of second language acquisition. They can be divided into internal and external factors. Internal factors are associated with learners' background features, i.e., age, personality, motivation, experiences, cognition, and their native language; external factors are associated with the learning situation surrounding the learners: curriculum, instruction, culture and status, motivation, and access to native speakers (Frankfurt International School, 2014, para. 2). Regardless of these factors, teachers and students play equally important roles in second language acquisition. They share the responsibilities and aim to reach the mutual goal of language teaching and learning.

Learners need to have either instrumental or integrative motivation to start the learning process. A desire to learn encourages intake and enables learners to utilize input surrounding them (Krashen, 2000). Learners with integrative motivation enjoy the process more than those lack intrinsic motivation; learners with instrumental motivation are likely to make greater efforts for their personal gains (Frankfurt International School, 2014). Younger learners will master pronunciation more easily than those who are older and have mastered their L1. However, the mature adult learners are able to use their analytical ability, achieving a higher level of competence more quickly than younger learners (DeKeyser, 2000). According to Jarvis and Pavlenko (2007), learners whose L1 is similar to the L2 (e.g., French, Spanish or Dutch learners of English) will achieve a better outcome of comprehension and production, compared to those whose L1 is unrelated to the L2 (e.g., Arabic or Chinese learners of English).
Without a doubt, teachers play a significant role in second language acquisition as well. Teachers are the leaders who get the students to comprehend and achieve (Wong & Wong, 2009) by providing well designed lessons, using the target language, and engaging students in interactive activities. How the teachers structure the curriculum and carry out instruction tremendously affect students' learning. When teachers assume all responsibilities in the classroom, acting as an authority and lecturing throughout the lesson, they put students in a dull, unengaging learning environment which diminishes learners' interest. When teachers design the lesson with four language skills in mind, create a student-centered learning environment, and implement activities that involve interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational modes (www.actfl.org), they will keep students motivated and engaged. Furthermore, teachers need to be aware of the factors affecting second language learning and choose the strategies that best suit their students. They need to make the input comprehensible, interesting, and/or relevant (Richard-Amato, 1996) so students will maintain their interest in second language acquisition.

In this artifact, I will address two factors which I consider to be imperative for accomplishing second language acquisition: 1) Comprehensible Input, and 2) Motivation, Anxiety, and the Affective Filter. I will discuss what they are, how they affect second language acquisition, and what strategies teachers should pursue to facilitate a comfortable and effective learning environment for students to acquire the second language. I will connect these themes to the experiences I had while teaching Chinese in Spring 2012 and interning at the English Language Center in Fall 2013. Both experiences broadened my understanding of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). They
gave me opportunities to apply the SLA theories I have learned and to observe other teachers in second language classrooms.

**Comprehensible Input**

Input is an essential ingredient for successful language acquisition. It is the engine that drives acquisition. Without input, acquisition simply does not happen. However, not all input is good input. Input has to be comprehensible, which means the learners must be able to understand what speakers or writers are communicating to them (Crawford, 2005; Lee & VanPatten, 2003). Krashen asserts that "comprehensible input causes acquisition." He declares if one is in the right atmosphere, surrounded by comprehensible input, "a person cannot avoid learning a second language" (Lee & Van Patten, 2003, p. 16). Comprehensible input helps students internalize what is learned and produce necessary language skills to communicate (Wong & VanPatten, 2003). Input is comprehensible when it bears meaning; in other words, when it carries a message of value to the learner. Lee and VanPatten (2003) stress "the language that the learner is listening to (or reading, if we are talking about written language) must contain some message to which the learner is supposed to attend" (p. 27). Only when learners link the features of language to their real-world meaning and experiences do the features of language become understood and maintained by the learners.

There are several ways to make input comprehensible and meaning bearing: (1) use visual cues frequently, (2) provide relevant background knowledge and content, (3) draw on the experiences of the learners (What is Comprehensible Input?, 2013), and (4) modify input thought interaction and negotiation (Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mandell, 2003). Visual cues provide concrete representations of teaching topics and thus enhance
the students' understanding. This way, comprehensible input becomes intake, which is “the language that learners actually attend to and that gets processed in working memory in some way” (Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mandell, 2003, p. 31).

Teachers can also make the input comprehensible by choosing the materials that are relevant to students' background knowledge, experiences, and cultural background (Delpit, 1995a; Freire, 2005). It effectively helps students to make a connection and understand most aspects of teaching materials. It is critical to remember students obtain various funds of knowledge (Riojas-Cortez, 2001; Moje et. al, 2004) from home, peer groups, their community, and other systems and networks. These funds of knowledge expand students' knowledge and life experience, which can be of tremendous help in making learning more meaningful when students are able to relate themselves to the materials learned.

According to Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro and Mandell (2003), one of the strategies to make input comprehensible is by simplifying it. This includes speaking at a slower rate, using high frequency words, using shorter sentences, giving learners a choice of responses with posed questions, using tag questions, and offering correction. Through interaction and negotiation of meaning with students, teachers are able to assess the degree of students' understanding and modify their teaching strategies accordingly. If learners grasp the message and understand most aspects of it, they will have a pleasant learning experience and be motivated to pursue further learning because "the more meaningful material is to learners, the easier the material is to learn" (Murray & Christison, 2011, p. 144).
Motivation, Anxiety and Affective Filter

A person must want to learn a second language because this decision begins the process of learning a new language (Stubbs, 2002). The feeling of wanting forms motivation, no matter what kind of motivation learners have, integrative or instrumental. Those who learn a language for the purpose of obvious gains have an instrumental motivation, such as finding a better paying job, graduating from college, or passing a citizenship test. Those who learn a language for the purpose of becoming a part of a community are said to have integrative motivation, such as heritage language learners or others who are immigrating to another country. Whether it is for economic or sociocultural benefits (Delpit, 1995a), "motivation... is often assumed to be a crucial precondition to active cognitive involvement" (Poupore, 2013, p. 91; see also Schumann, 1998).

However, the motivation often subsides after the learning begins. Language learners commonly express experiencing feelings of anxiety, apprehension, and nervousness when learning to speak the second/foreign language (Tanveer, 2007). Anxiety disrupts the process of second language acquisition. As Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) state, anxiety is "the apprehension experienced when a situation requires the use of a second language with which the individual is not fully proficient". According to Krashen’s (1985) affective filter theory, anxiety, self-doubt, and negative emotion will impede the language learning process, thus preventing efficient language learning. This kind of experience happens when (1) teachers are "impatient for oral production in the second language before students are ready" (Crawford, 2004, p. 191), (2) students face an
awkward social situation in which their home language is not useful, and they are not able to communicate with people or make themselves understood (Tabors, 2006), (3) students are told their language is wrong (Stubbs, 2002), and (4) students are constantly being corrected. When learners experience anxiety or fear, the brain releases a chemical called TMT (trimethyltin) which "disrupts brain cell development" and "impairs short-term memory and work efficiency" (Willis, 2006, p. 59). Willis (2006) also confirms:

PET scans show how information coming from the sensory receptor areas of the brain must travel through the amygdala to get into the hippocampus, from where it can be sent to the executive function and long-term memory storage areas in the frontal lobe. These scans demonstrate that when the amygdala is in its highly metabolic state of hyperstimulation from stress, these pathways leading to memory storage are blocked." (p. 25).

In other words, PET scans provide physical evidence that anxiety obstructs learning.

Motivation and anxiety are important components in language learning which relate to affective filter. The affective filter is a psychological force that can aid or interrupt the process of language learning. It can be raised or lowered depending on the learning environment the person experiences. When the affective filter is high, it "keeps comprehensible input from going through" (Crawford, 2004, p. 191); when the affective filter is lower, it makes the language learning process "more easily...accomplished" (Delpit, 1995c, p. 50). Teachers should build a comfortable learning environment in the classroom where students can relax but be receptive, so that they can freely engage and participate while sharing their ideas and values without feeling inferior or being judged. Teachers should create a classroom culture in which each individual's experience and
beliefs are validated, and learners are empowered as well as motivated to learn. Lowering the affective filter means that students experience less anxiety and less stress and thus feel more confident. A curriculum that offers learning topics associated with students' lives, interests, and experiences will help students learn as well as motivate them, thus producing the desired outcome more effectively. When students feel comfortable enough to freely engage in the activities the teachers provide, knowing their personal opinions are validated and that their beliefs and values are accepted, they will most likely engage in the language learning activities, which will increase their confidence and help them remain motivated. Motivation helps maintain the "desire of an individual to continually learn the language and feel the satisfaction experienced in this activity" (Gardner, 1985, p. 159).

**Personal Experience and reflection**

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to teach Chinese 1020 during the Spring 2013 semester. It was an eye-opening experience. I had studied multiple theories and methodologies in second language acquisition, which I was eager to apply in my teaching. I was ready to try out a variety of pedagogical applications to my class, hoping every single step would go as I planned and students would achieve the outcome I predicted. There was no set schedule for me to follow: I had to be observant and flexible to adjust to the students' needs. The mixture of ages (range from 19 to 34), educational backgrounds (from Music major, Art major, Political Science major to Undeclared), ethnic backgrounds (Caucasian, Asian, and mixed races), and religious background (Christians and Buddhism) created a diverse community in my class. On top of that, their Chinese proficiency levels varied: two students had a military background and had
undergone a 5-12 month intensive Chinese language training, two students were heritage learners who spoke Cantonese at home, and the rest were second-semester Chinese learners. The Art major who wrote beautifully had a hard time distinguishing the tones of Chinese pronunciation, while the Music major who spoke with almost perfect intonation had a difficult time differentiating the similarity of Chinese characters. Then there was my teaching.

I started with common ground and emphasized that we were in class for only one reason: learning Chinese. I told them "what happens in the classroom stays in the classroom": accents are okay, mistakes are okay, questions are welcome, and speaking Chinese in our class is a must. In this environment, students felt comfortable trying things. Instead of correcting them, I explained how intonation affects meaning in conversation which made them laugh and desire to "sound it right". I used a lot of examples and topics which related to their personal experiences and interests as well as pictures and TPR (Total Physical Responses) to develop comprehension. After they understood the meanings of words and sentences, students interacted with each other to complete activities such as interview questions and information gap activities to practice their listening and speaking skills.

At the end of Spring semester, I was proud to say "I enjoy teaching". However, there were still many things I needed to do to improve my teaching technique and style. I had created an environment in which the students would be comfortable speaking the target language, but next time I would like to focus equally on literacy ability in reading and writing Chinese.
Then I had the opportunity to intern at the English Language Center of Cache Valley (ELC) for Fall 2013 Semester. The ELC's mission is to teach English, basic life skills, U.S. Citizenship preparation, and employment education to adult speakers of other languages. The services the center provides act as a catalyst for education-based change leading to opportunities for individual and community prosperity, self-sufficiency, and cultural integration. After talking to the internship coordinator, I was assigned to the Citizenship preparation class on Saturdays as well as the English Level 2 class on the Tuesday and Thursday nights.

The Citizenship class is offered weekly to assist those who desire to obtain U.S. citizenship. All who attend the class are from countries where English is not their native language. Because they will be interviewed in English by an officer of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, they need to develop their knowledge of U.S. history and government. Murray and Christison (2011) state that "content area teachers must develop expertise in specific content areas and also develop expertise in teaching a second language acquisition" (p. 142). Unfortunately, this goal-oriented content-based class was taught in a teacher-centered environment where lecturing was the main teaching style. Even though pictures and video clips were presented during the class, the teacher mainly focused on feeding students knowledge: factual answers to all 100 questions of the citizenship test. The instructor relied heavily on volunteers to ask pre-written questions of the students. The interaction was focused on memorization to get the answers right. Students memorized the questions and memorized the answers. I wonder whether, after they pass the test, the information they memorized ever becomes their own knowledge. However, this class experience made me think about "motivation". The students who
sign up for this class are those who want to obtain U.S. citizenship. Teachers do not have to force the students to study for this test which costs each of them $680. This class offers instruction and reinforcement of materials. The students work hard, they memorize the answers, and they come to class to practice answering the questions. They are highly motivated; however, the linguistic challenge and unfamiliar topics cause stress and anxiety for some students. I wish different instructional strategies and styles were used for this class. The instructor could design task-based activities, information gap activities, and interviews to make the learning engaging and meaningful in order to alleviate the stress caused by tedious memorization and drills.

By contrast, in the English level 2 class, there were more meaningful activities going on. The class provides English lessons on basic real-life communication skills: weather, emergency preparation, vacation, shopping, banking, etc. Students seemed to enjoy learning English related to topics they had experienced. The instructor was very friendly. She made the students feel welcome and created a comfortable learning environment by embracing their home language and validating the information students had offered. She allowed students to look up the new words in the home-language dictionary and write down the meaning of new words in their native language. Peregoy and Boyle (2008) confirm that "only when students become comfortably integrated into your classroom's social and academic routines will optimal second language acquisition and academic learning occur" (p.15).

Steeped in the belief system of CLT, I was stunned when the teacher asked students to write down the translation of the vocabulary words to make them comprehensible. But quickly I realized that students in the class were at a lower
speaking/writing level and the teacher needed to have students understand the words. By doing this, students could better comprehend the meaning of words based on what they already knew, thus utilizing their native language and empowering themselves in learning English. Teachers need to link the new information to students' prior knowledge experience. "Learning only occurs when prior knowledge is accessed and linked to new information" (Bartolome, 1994, p. 182).

Overall, I have confirmed some of my practices through these experiences from the MSLT program training: (1) promote a lower affective filter and positive learning environment, (2) empower students for what they can accomplish, (3) motivate and engage students, (4) utilize students' background knowledge and experiences to make second language acquisition happen, (5) use different resources to achieve a higher level of learning, and (6) adjust the instruction according to what students have and need (Delpit, 1995b). I have also learned about the importance of teachers' awareness of respecting students' home language and cultural background which motivates students' participation and makes input compressible.

According to Crawford (2004), "the quality of teaching appears to be a significant variable in second language acquisition" (p. 188). I still have a lot to learn and much to research about second language teaching.
CULTURE ARTIFACT

How would you say it differently?
A study of refusal speech act between Chinese and American English
Introduction

When people engage in conversations, speech acts often occur. According to Austin (1962), speech acts, are “the actions performed via utterances only with verbs” or “verbal phrase, typically formulaic, which explicitly indicates the act the speaker is performing as it is uttered” (LoCastro, 2012, p. 60). Such speech acts include requests, invitations, suggestions, offers, compliments, apologies, and refusals.

Refusals can be used when responding to requests, invitations, suggestions, and offers. Refusals are difficult because they convey that the speaker disapproves or rejects the interlocutor’s ideas, hence refusals are a threat to the face of both participants (CARLA, 2012). Refusals can cause hurt feelings, disappointment, embarrassment, and upset, even a breakdown of the conversation. Different strategies might be used to perform the speech act of refusal, and culture plays a critical role in the decision making.

Culture, an important aspect of everyday life, influences language in use (LoCastro, 2012). Learners cannot engage in an effective, successful conversation without obtaining a thorough understanding of the cultural background of the target language. This paper shows the importance of awareness of cultural differences of second language learning and intercultural communication. It also takes a look at the factors and strategies used by Chinese speakers and American English speakers performing the refusal speech act to provide insights on the similarities and differences of refusal speech acts between Chinese speakers and American English speakers.
Literature Review

Culture and Pragmatic Competence

Humans are social beings living in a communal environment who engage in daily interactions with other beings. These interactions in the community form certain practices, values and beliefs, which create a culture. According to (Moran, 2001), culture is “the evolving way of life of a group of persons, consisting of a shared set of practices associated with a shared set of products, based upon a shared set of perspective on the world, and set with in specific social contexts” (p. 24). Since culture is “the set of fundamental ideas, practices, and experiences shared by a group of people” (p. 11), it shapes the beliefs, norms, and attitudes in a group of people as well as guides the behaviors of the group (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004). Culture varies from region to region, country to country. It influences language use in many ways; from the words and phrases we choose to the information we process and decipher (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004). The language used in daily life is “embedded with interlocutor’s beliefs and values, which are especially noticeable when they come from different language and cultural background” (Tatsuki & Houck, 2010, p. 8). For example, the Chinese greeting "have you eaten?" doesn’t really mean that the speaker wants to know the detailed information of whether the addressee had breakfast or not. An American ending the conversation with "let’s get together some time" doesn’t mean the speaker really wants to go for a cup of coffee together (Tatsuki & Houck, 2010). Both examples are pragmatic expressions with different cultural backgrounds and require understanding of the culture for correct interpretation.
Many cultural products and practices are explicit and tangible, while cultural perspectives are tacit and intangible (Moran, 2001). As a result, the inappropriate use of language, verbal or non-verbal, could cause misunderstanding or stereotyping (Tatsuki & Houck, 2012), for “speakers do not share the same cultural presuppositions” (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004, p. 239). Language is the product of culture (Moran, 2001). People use language to express their thoughts, to communicate with others, and to function in the community. As DeCapua and Wintergerst (2004) point out “successful communication entails sharing the same or similar interpretations of the intent and meaning of the message and being able to negotiate successfully one’s way through the communicative interaction” (p. 241). To correctly interpret the intended meaning of speakers requires understanding of the cultural values of the interlocutors.

“Communicative misunderstandings often result when speakers from different cultures engage in interactions in which the speakers follow the rules or norms of their own speech communities” (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004, p. 242). To achieve the communicative goal, learners need to acquire pragmatic competence. Pragmatics “focuses on the speaker’s intended meaning to understand the interactionally constructed inferences that go beyond the actual words being used” (LoCastro, 2012, p.18).

Learning pragmatics means to become aware of the appropriate and accurate ways to speak and perceive intended meaning of language use in a conversation (Krisnawati, 2011; LoCastro, 2012). Language use refers to what the speakers do with the language, such as focusing on expression of meaning rather than the form of utterances (LoCastro, 2012). Depending on the cultural background of the addressee, the interpretation of messages may vary (Tatsuki & Houck, 2012). If learners are not aware
of the pragmatics of the target language, they will not be able to respond to the true intention of the conversation. According to LoCastro (2012), without adequate understanding of a co-participant’s pragmatic meanings in the course of a conversation, the listener will not be able to contribute to successful communication. Through explicit instruction of pragmatics, students can learn what to say and how to say it in a given sociocultural context and are able to communicate effectively and appropriately (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004). As a result, learners will know how to encode and decode the meaning and accomplish the purpose of conversation successfully.

**Face and Politeness associated with Refusal**

A refusal is a responding option to initiating acts, such as requests, invitations, suggestions, and offers (Tatsuki & Houck, 2012). The hearer refuses to do something the speaker asks by declining an invitation the speaker issues, disapproving or disagreeing with the speaker’s ideas, or rejecting advice the speaker offers. It is challenging and complex (Guo, 2012; Tatsuki & Houck, 2010) compared to other speech acts because refusals send out a negative message—“no”. The interlocutors need to respond appropriately to the initiating act for the conversation to continue.

Tatsuki and Houck (2010) mention that refusals may be direct and/or indirect. Direct refusals are often short and clear: “No, I can’t”, “I can’t” or “No” and are frequently softened or mitigated, for example “Unfortunately, I don’t think I’ll be able to come” (p. 164), to avoid offending the person who initiates the preceding act. Indirect refusals often include (1) Reason or explanation, (2) expression of regret or apology, and (3) alternatives (Tanck, 2004; Tatsuki & Houck, 2010). However, this kind of response
tends to not show the expressions of negative willingness or ability, and it requires interpretation by the listener.

There are two types of refusals in Chinese culture: substantive and ritual (Chang, 2008; Guo, 2012; Kasper, 1995; Yang, 2008). A substantive refusal is a real refusal when the addressee says “no” directly or indirectly and means “no”. Ritual refusal, on the other hand, is when the addressee says “no” directly or indirectly, but in fact the addressee is willing to accept the initiating act (Yang, 2008). Different strategies are used depending on the types of refusal.

Refusals threaten the face of both speaker and hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1987; CARLA, 2012; Chang, 2008; Guo, 2012; Kasper, 1995; LoCastro, 2012; Yang, 2008). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), face is "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (p. 61). People cooperate because they want to maintain face in interaction. If face is not maintained, the interaction could cause embarrassment or misunderstanding. The conversation might break down, creating an unfriendly, rude, uncomfortable, and impolite feeling between the interlocutors.

According to LoCastro's (2012) polite theory, achieving a mutual benefit by maintaining face is understood by both speaker and addressee during interaction. LoCastro also states "an individual expects others to recognize and acknowledge their face needs through verbal behaviors of a great variety" (p. 137). Therefore, negative politeness or avoidance-based strategies, and positive politeness or solidarity-based strategies, are used to soften or mitigate face threat. As to which strategy to use, it all depends on the social distance between the speaker and the addressee, and the social power differential between them.
Similarities and Difference of using the refusal strategies between Chinese and American English

As culture shapes the values, beliefs, attitude, and norms of society, culture consequently affects language use and the interpretation of conversation. Chinese culture differs from American culture in many ways, but in giving the refusals, there are similarities as well as differences. As Li (2007) mentions, the similarity between Chinese and American English refusal is that both "try to abide by the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle" (p. 65). Both Chinese and American English speakers try to follow Grice’s (1975) four maxims: quantity, quality, relation, and manner. They try to make their conversation as informative as needed, but not speaking more than is required. They will not speak what is believed to be false, or about things without adequate evidence. The conversation is relevant, as well as clear and orderly so listeners and speakers speak cooperatively, are mutually accepted, and understand one another in a particular way. Both Chinese and Americans also take politeness into consideration when performing the refusal speech act. They understand “politeness is the norm that people of different cultural backgrounds must obey and uphold” and “to satisfy others’ faces is to save your own face” (Li, 2007, p. 65). Both Chinese and Americans prefer to choose indirect refusal speech acts rather than direct refusal speech acts (王愛華 Wáng ài huá & 吳貴涼 wú guì liáng, 2005 in Li, 2007; Tatsuki & Houck, 2010).

In mainstream culture in the U.S., people believe in equality, develop individualism, exercise informality, and prefer directness (Jason & Posner, 1995). The Chinese, on the other hand, pay attention to social status, enact formality, preserve face,
and maintain good relationships without drawing too much attention to oneself. Several factors influence the pragmatics of refusals and the choice of refusal strategy use:

1. Equality vs. Hierarchy
2. Individualism vs. collectivism
3. Informality vs. Formality
4. Directness vs. Indirectness
5. Structure

**Equality vs. Hierarchy**

Americans believe that "all men are created equal" as stated in their Declaration of Independence. No matter what their intelligence, physical condition or economic status is, people should be treated as equal. Li (2007) in his article pointed out that because of this belief, an American “would probably refuse the request of his supervisor more directly than Chinese” (p. 66). Americans would choose to use the negative word “cannot” to express an opinion clearly while Chinese would use the objective excuse (My child is having a fever, I have to take him to the hospital) to refuse without mentioning the negative word, *no*, directly to the supervisor, who has a higher status.

**Individualism vs. collectivism**

Americans foster individualism, which emphasizes that each individual is “completely and marvelously unique” (Jason & Posner, 1995, p. 7). “The individual’s life belongs to him and he has an inalienable right to live it as he sees fit, to act on his own judgment, to keep and use the product of his effort, and to pursue the values of his choosing” (Biddle, 2012, para. 2). Li (2007) shows that an American son may directly
refuse his father's request to practice piano after dinner because there is an interesting TV program at that moment. The child can express his opinion by saying *I don't like playing the piano after supper, because I don't want to miss the interesting program.* American children may even refuse their parents directly by saying *I don't want to play piano after supper. You know I always watch my show first* (Li, 2007). The Chinese child who obeys and respects the rank of authority will use the future promise *Ok, I will start practice after I finish watching TV* to refuse the present requirement, but does not use the direct negative word. Chinese belong to a collectivist culture (Li, 2007), which strives for harmony and group belonging. They suppress personal desires and individual needs and emphasize the goal of family or work group. It is unlikely for a Chinese person to refuse a family member's request, contrary to an Americans in their response because they believe in the pursuit of individual rather than collective interest.

**Informality vs. Formality**

Americans are one of the most informal and casual people in the world (Jason & Posner, 1995). American bosses often urge their employees to call them by their first names and even feel uncomfortable if they are called by the title “Mr.” or Mrs.” (p. 10). On the contrary, the Chinese interaction is more formal, more structured (De Mente, 2009) and its “society is ranked by the hierarchy essentially” (Li, 2007, p. 65). The formality ties to a social status which affects the strategy use of refusal. According to Li (2007), Chinese refusal speech acts are more indirect, when the refused person’s social status is higher than that of the speaker.
Directness vs. Indirectness

As mentioned earlier, the similarity between Chinese and American English in refusal is that they both prefer using indirect strategies (see the chart below, adapted from 王愛華 Wáng àihuá & 吳貴涼 wú guì liáng, 2005).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Direct refusal</th>
<th>Ability of Negation</th>
<th>Indirect refusal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American English</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, from the research conducted by 王愛華 Wáng àihuá and 吳貴涼 wú guì liáng (2005), Americans use the direct refusal 2.6 times more than Chinese. They also use indirect refusal significantly less than Chinese. Americans tend to prefer direct method communication styles (Guo, 2012; Jason & Posner, 1995). It is critical to give pragmatic instruction regarding American cultural aspect of being direct to Chinese learners of English, and vice versa. Then there is less misunderstanding or hurt feelings in the communication. Chinese learners understand Americans are not trying to make you lose face with their directness. Therefore, no means no. American learners understand when communicating with Chinese people, it is expected to haggle back and forth during conversations while involving ritual refusals. Many American universities, such as Northeastern University, [http://www.northeastern.edu/issi/uslife.html](http://www.northeastern.edu/issi/uslife.html) and Harvard University, [http://hio.harvard.edu/settlinginaharvard/orientation/gettingtoknowamericans/](http://hio.harvard.edu/settlinginaharvard/orientation/gettingtoknowamericans/) have posted information to inform their international students regarding U.S. culture & customs, especially the directness and the meaning of “no”.
Structure

Tanck (2004) states that researchers have studied and analyzed refusals as a formulaic sequence, which in the case of refusing an invitation, consists of (1) an expression of regret, followed by (2) an excuse, and ending with (3) an offer of alternative (p. 2). In Chen’s (1996) research that Tanck (2004) studied, it was found that “an expression of regret, common in American speakers’ refusal, was generally not produced by the Chinese speakers, which could lead to unpleasant feelings between speakers in an American context” (p. 3). Refusals produced in English by Japanese and Chinese speakers have been found to be sometimes “vague and indirect, or lacking the requisite excuse prescribed by American Culture” (p. 4). Tanck (2004) also finds “non-native speakers of English produced fewer expressions of regret and offers of alternative” (p.11). There are a couple of reasons why Chinese people use few expressions of regret and offers of alternative. Li (2007) proposes that the Chinese tend to use the politeness refusal strategy of “marginally touching the point”. They are more economical in their choices for the number of the refusal strategies so they can restore relationships without burning bridges. Also the Chinese think they have to follow-up with action if they offer an alternative (Vintoni, 2012).

Conclusion

No matter what kind of motivation the learner has, learning the target language means to develop the ability to speak the language to communicate with others and make oneself understood while using the target language. However, communication involves interactions among people who may have different cultural background knowledge,
values, and beliefs (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004; LoCastro, 2010; Moran, 2001; Tatsuki & Houck, 2010). Glitches and misunderstandings may arise from the fact that when speaker and listener share the same language, language use is embedded in the contextual framework each speaker brings (Tatsuki, & Houck, 2010). It is especially critical for learners of a second language to understand and learn the pragmatics of the target language to avoid misunderstanding and stereotyping. The learners need to understand what is being said, not only the literal meaning of the words, but the meaning beyond the words for the communicative purpose in a different cultural context.

Farahian, Rezaee, and Gholami (2012) demonstrate that direct instruction significantly affects learners’ use of refusals. Language teachers should be aware of the pragmatics of language use in the target language. Only then can they provide explicit instruction in pragmatics, providing input, raising awareness, and promoting comprehension of different pragmatic meanings (Soler & Pitarch, 2010) to help learners communicate effectively in the target language.
LITERACY ARTIFACT

Learning Chinese characters using Quizlet
Introduction

Chinese has become the most widely spoken world language, with nearly 1.4 billion native and non-native speakers (Most widely spoken language in the world, 2014). Speaking Chinese can be advantageous. According to the World Bank, China has "recently become the second largest economy and increasingly played an important and influential role in the global economy" (China overview, 2014). Knowing how and what to say in Chinese provides advantages when doing business with China; business people who speak the language are able to develop a more effective relationship with their Chinese partners. A 2010 web report of the Modern Language Association of America showed that Chinese course enrollments in higher education increased 18.2% in 2009 (Furman, Goldberg, & Lusin, 2014). However, learning Chinese is not easy. The Chinese language uses tones and a logographic system, causing most American learners of Chinese to find intonation and literacy development quite challenging.

As Wilkins (1972) states, "Without grammar, very little can be conveyed. Without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed" (p.111). Development of the lexicon is the foundation of language acquisition. Without knowledge of words, readers cannot understand what they are reading. Word recognition and vocabulary retention are essential to literacy development. The ability to read and write Chinese is further influenced by its writing system, which contains characters that represent words; unlike alphabetic writing systems that have an obvious sound-script correspondence (Shen, 2004). For English speakers familiar with alphabetic writing systems, it is a rather difficult task to write and memorize the form, meaning, and sound of Chinese characters (Everson, 1998; Shen, 2004; Xing, 2006). In addition, students need to acquire a large
number of characters before becoming literate (Sung & Wu, 2011). The non-alphabetic, logographic writing system of Chinese requires dedicated students. Learning it is a "labor-intensive endeavor" and "places huge demands on their memories, time, and study capabilities" (Everson, 1998, p. 194). Nevertheless, tones and characters are foundational skills of learning Chinese. "Without learning them, students cannot speak, understand, read or write" (Xing, 2006, p. 29).

Teachers, being aware of these challenges, seek answers through research and discussion, try to alleviate the struggles and help students conquer the difficulty. Over the past two decades, with the help of advanced technology, many experimental tasks have been performed in visual word recognition associated with cognitive effects on the learning process. The use of multimedia technology for second language acquisition has been widely discussed and has significantly increased as well due to technology development. Technology and computer-assisted applications in language acquisition have enabled teachers and learners to work together in and outside the classroom.

However, while the necessary technology is now available, it is not clear whether teachers should integrate technology and computer-assisted applications beyond classroom instruction. What might be the benefits of mandatory use of computer-assisted applications as homework assignments? In this proposed research project, I will explore students' reactions to incorporating Quizlet with Chinese curriculum. I will also measure the extent of computer application in assisting students to retain vocabulary and improve word recognition. Data collected for this research will be compared and analyzed to determine if incorporating a computer-assisted tool significantly improves vocabulary
retention for American learners of Chinese. The results will guide teachers in designing Chinese curriculum and instruction in the future.

**Literature Review**

**Challenges of learning Chinese characters and words**

In an alphabetic writing system, letters represent the sounds of words. Learners develop literacy skills through exposure as they learn to connect "the knowledge of letters and letter-sound correspondences by experience with a range of types of print, and by the vocabulary, syntactic, and discourse abilities involved in understanding text" (Hemphill & Tivnan, 2008, p. 428). Once they possess decoding skills, they are able to interpret and convey meaning of words through the association of sounds of letters (Rayner & Pollatsek, 1994). When their phonological awareness is well established they will start building up their vocabulary through reading. Unlike the alphabetic writing system, where the letters represent phonemes of the spoken language, the Chinese written language is a logographic system which consists of three tiers: characters, radicals, and strokes (Shen, 2004; Shen & Ke, 2007; Sung & Wu, 2010). The Chinese writing system is rather complex as many researchers have noted.

The basic units of written Chinese are characters. One character usually represents one morpheme. There are about 7000 morpheme in Mandarin, but there are only 1200 syllables, so more than five morphemes, or characters, share one syllable. One of the important features in Chinese is the large number of single-syllable homophones. More than 80% of modern Chinese characters are phonetic compound characters. A compound character consists of two parts: one component is called a semantic radical which carries information about meaning.
and another component called a phonetic, which provides information about pronunciation. (Shu, 2003, p. 275)

Sung and Wu (2011) emphasize the difficulty of learning Chinese when they state that "each symbol [in the logograph writing system] represents an idea that has little correspondence to its pronunciation" (p. 684). Learners report the sounds are not relevant to the meaning of the Chinese characters and there is no direct connection between the sound and meaning (Shen & Ke, 2007). Therefore, learners need to invest tremendous amounts of time to memorize the unfamiliar writing strokes and uncommon pronunciations of Chinese characters, trying to grasp and remember the meaning, sound, and written form of Chinese words.

A key aspect of Chinese pronunciation is the tones. Chinese is a tonal language which means "every Chinese [character] has a tone and every tone is built in lexicon" (Xing, 2006, p. 87). As a result, tone affects the meaning of words. Shen (2010) reports that "55.55% of the students reported that sound was the most difficult component to learn" (p. 54). Learners who speak non-tonal languages are less sensitive to the intonation of Chinese since their native language does not require them to distinguish and perform the subtle tonal differences. This lack of sensitivity to pitch tones frustrates learners of Chinese, who indicate that tones "can be confusing and hard to differentiate" (p. 54). Moreover, learners of Chinese have difficulty pronouncing the different tones due to interference between L1 and the target language. Because of the characters and the tones, Chinese is considered the most difficult language to learn for non-native speakers (Shen, 2004). Naturally, American learners of Chinese require much practice to learn pronunciation and the characters of words.
Strategies used by non-native speakers of Chinese

Language learning strategies refer to the plan of action determined and used by language learners to achieve their overall goal of being able to communicate in the target language. It has been claimed that learning strategies are "one of the important factors in the success of second language learning" (Sung & Wu, 2011, p. 685). Sung and Wu (2011) also summarize Wang's (1998) findings of first year Chinese language learners' strategy use for learning Chinese characters at an American university:

80% of the learners used repetition strategy in practicing writing Chinese characters. 93% of the learners reported that they used memorization strategy. In examining students' cognitive strategy use, only 20% of the learners used a categorization strategy to study Chinese characters. Sixty percent of the class used a read-aloud strategy to study Chinese and 73% of them used a translation strategy (p. 687).

Many other strategies have been suggested to assist in the learning of Chinese vocabulary. Examples are students can associate the sound with pinyin, link a new character with a similar character previously learned, visualize the character in their head, create a story with its meaning, as well as group the character with other characters containing the same radical or having the similar meanings. Students can remember the character in a meaningful sentence, pay attention to how the character is used in context, preview the new words, make vocabulary cards, go over the flashcards on a daily basis, and quiz themselves (Vocabulary Strategy, 2014). Shen (2005) identifies that strategies commonly used by learners of Chinese are "rote memorization, graphic cues, context cues, and knowledge of radicals" (p. 53).
Technology in second language acquisition

In 2013, college students spent 60% of the day interacting with technology, nearly 15 hours/day: over 5 hours on a laptop, 3 and half hours on a cell phone, and 1.3 hours using a gaming console (How much time do college students spend with technology, 2014). In other words, College students are completely connected and engaged with technology.

For the past two decades, the use of multimedia technology has been developed to help teachers and students in second language acquisition (Arnold & Ducate, 2011; Chun, 2011). It has saved teachers the time to manually write each word on classroom blackboard, enriched the content delivered in the classroom, permitted learners to gather greater amounts of information, and allowed students to study from a distance (Zhu, 2010). Technology also provides a platform for learners to implement the strategies suited to them for learning Chinese. Sung and Wu (2011) state that one of the challenges of learning Chinese is the “large number of characters to be acquired before becoming literate” (p.685). To overcome this challenge, students can use technology to incorporate “memory strategies” (Sung & Wu, 2011, p. 686) in remembering Chinese characters. For example, flash cards are commonly used for learning. Nakata (2011) posits that the ideal flashcard software would be able to "provide various types of exercises, increase retrieval effort, promote generative use, be flexible about the block size." (p. 21).

Quizlet.com is a free website that enables teachers and students to create flash cards. It also generates interactive games and tests for material entered into it. Price
(2014) points out Quizlet.com benefits language teaching and learning in the following ways:

1. Quizlet reads the word and definition to the student out loud, enhancing students' grasp of pronunciation.
2. Quizlet provides targeted spelling feedback.
3. Quizlet provides adaptive training to help students focus on the items most difficult for them.
4. Quizlet generates customizable randomized testing for students to boost their long term memory.
5. Quizlet generates interactive games to help students study instructor-specified course content.
6. Quizlet can be used at home or on the go.
7. Quizlet can be used to generate paper handouts, flash cards, or game materials.
8. Students can export or mix and match different card sets together to create a personalized deck.
9. Instructors can create a "class" for their students on Quizlet and track their progress if desired.
10. Once your students become familiar with Quizlet.com, they can discover countless other user-created flashcards.
11. Students can export Quizlet card sets and use them with other programs or websites. (Price, 2014)

From the list above, Quizlet seems a perfect fit for the first year students. It provides the first year students a tool to practice their word recognition of Chinese characters.

**Motivation of the study and Research Questions**

After teaching CHIN 1020 in Spring 2013, I found some of my students were not able to write some of the Chinese characters they had supposedly learned, even though they were able to speak them. I was concerned about their literacy development because written characters are essential in learning Chinese. Without knowing characters, students cannot understand written Chinese. Searching for answers in helping learners with written word recognition and vocabulary retention, I found most of the research
focuses on the "emerging literacy of children", as well as the investigation of "word recognition as a performance factor that separates good and poor readers" (Everson, 1998, p. 195). Researchers have conducted few studies on word recognition among learners in secondary or university foreign language (FL) settings for the several reasons. First, learners in secondary or university are considered "already equipped" (Everson, 1998, p.195) with word recognition skill when it comes to the reading tasks. Secondly, according to reports from American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) and Modern Language Association (MLA), of the high school and university students enrolled in languages other than English, over 86 percent of students take courses in languages with an alphabetic writing system, i.e., Spanish, French, or German. Naturally, the majority of "the American students who have already developed L1 alphabetic reading skills do not experience significant difficulty at the orthography level when learning to read in these languages" (Everson, 1998, p.195). Last, past research has focused more on the "schema-theoretic models of reading" rather on the "graphic display and perception of print" (Everson, 1998, p. 195).

In addition, Wang (1998, cited in Sung & Wu, 2011) concludes the low percentage of categorization strategy used is due to the instruction teachers carry out in the classroom. Wang claims that instructors focus on the listening and speaking skills and do not spend time teaching Chinese characters, which was exactly what I did. In order to achieve overall Chinese language proficiency without compromising my focus on communicative activities in the classroom, I have decided to investigate the incorporation of mandatory use of Quizlet.com outside of class. I would like to know if Quizlet helps improve Chinese character recognition and how students react to the
requirement of using Quizlet as an instructional tool to learn Chinese. By examining the 
incorporation of Quizlet in the curriculum, I can find out whether mandatory use of 
technology assists students in language learning.

Hence, the following are my research questions:

1. Does using Quizlet.com help students retain vocabulary and improve word 
   recognition?
2. Does using Quizlet.com alone yield a better result than other tasks in enhancing 
   vocabulary retention?

Research Method

Sample and data collection

This study will take place at a university in the United States. Participants are 
college students enrolled in their first semester of Chinese language courses. Two groups 
of students who are native speakers of English will be randomly chosen from CHIN 1010 
classes, section one and two. Details regarding students' ages, gender, their background, 
and previous experience with Chinese will be collected when the research is carried out. 
Data will be gathered throughout the semester comprising of 7 oral and written quizzes 
and 3 examinations. Students' scores will be compared and interpreted based on statistics 
from quizzes and examinations.

Research design

The research will use the quantitative approach. It is an experimental study which 
examines two groups of learners over a semester, involving the tasks of using flash cards,
and using Quizlet. This experimental design operates under the assumption that mandatory use of technology increases word recognition and vocabulary retention of Chinese due to its interactive features. Instructor(s) will incorporate the research into a syllabus and request the students to perform the following additional tasks in their sections such as: 1) to study 20 minutes each day for 5 days using flash cards, 2) to study 20 minutes each day for 5 days using Quizlet. The flash cards will be available via the university’s learning management system for students. A demonstration of how to use Quizlet will be given to those who participate in the Quizlet experiment. Both groups will receive identical instruction, perform the same communicative activities, and take indistinguishable tests in the classroom. In addition, both groups will be assigned the same character writing assignments.

Conclusion

Everson (1998) mentions there has not been much research interest in word recognition conducted among learners in secondary or university foreign language settings. This proposed research study explores the challenges of word recognition in adult learners of Chinese as rapid technology evolvement presents new educational practices for those who want to utilize technology to enhance learning and teaching. Furthermore, it measures the effect of incorporating a computer-assisted application in course curriculum for it correspondingly changes students’ learning and study habits. Does it improve word recognition and increase vocabulary retention enough for the American first year learners of Chinese to incorporate it into the course curriculum? The
answer will aid Chinese instructors in designing their curriculum and determine if mandatory use of technology assists students in language learning.
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES
Communicative Language Teaching

The first time I heard the term Communicative language Teaching (CLT) was in Fall semester 2010. I had decided to take a course, starting out as a non-matriculated student, in the Master of Second Language Teaching (MSLT). My plan was simple: after I retire from USU, I would return to Taiwan to devote my knowledge and experience from learning English. After all, I have studied English since I was thirteen years old plus I have been living in the United States for over 20 years.

However, being a graduate student in the MSLT program has completely changed the way I see and practice teaching second language. The first book I read regarding second language teaching was the Teacher's Handbook: Contextualized Language Instruction by Shrum and Glisan (2010). They laid out facts and information for 21st century language teachers, who should "facilitate foreign language learning in settings within and beyond the classroom" (p. 11). Many theories and methodologies were introduced, such as behaviorism, cognitive psychology, input hypothesis, and interaction hypothesis. Shrum and Glisan urge teachers to understand the role of contextualized input, output, and interaction in language learning. They encourage teachers using contextualized language instruction to address the goals of the ACTFL standards for foreign language learning. They advocate for teachers using an interactive approach to develop interpretive communication and a story-based approach to teach grammar. Through contextualized instruction in foreign language, students increase their language ability by building and utilizing their communicative competence, which includes discourse competence, linguistic competence, and strategic competence.
The authors' concept of contextualized instruction confused me. The information I read in their textbook did not match my own learning experience of a foreign language. I started to learn English at age 13. English is a requirement in secondary schools in Taiwan, intended to bring advancement opportunities for students in their future career. I remembered the intensive drills and memorization exercises when I first began the learning process. I used to spend a significant amount of time every day memorizing vocabulary, sentences, and short articles, reciting them over and over. Grammar was the central focus, taking up almost 80% of a lesson. Teachers would help students make sense of the sentence structures by analyzing, dissecting, and explaining the rules of these sentences. Grammar rules were clarified in detail and then students were constantly quizzed. Weekly assessments were to ensure that students memorized vocabulary, grammar rules, and other important aspects of English.

I did pretty well learning English; I memorized the vocabulary lists, recited the scripted lessons, and practiced conversation sentences from the textbook. Occasionally I was able to understand the lines when I watched English movies without reading the captions. For me, English was simply a tool that helped me get into the best high school and college. Making sure I had the right answer for the grammar questions was more important than speaking the language. In addition, teachers explained English grammar structures in the Chinese language, causing me to not see the advantage of speaking the language. After studying English for over 10 years, I was able to communicate sufficiently, albeit not fluently, with English speakers. So, when reading Shrum and Glisen, I wondered what the importance of a contextualized learning environment was. If students do not go through the rigorous study of memorizing words and drilling, as well
as understanding the structure of grammar, how will students know to use the new language?

Meanwhile, I kept reading and pondering. When reading *Making Communicative Language Teaching Happed* by Lee and VanPatten (2003), I reached a new level of understanding in communicative language teaching. In the Atlas Complex style of teaching, the teacher assumes all responsibility for what happens in the classroom. Teachers represent authority; they are the experts and central figure in the classroom and the authoritative transmitter of knowledge. Students’ roles and tasks are those of passive audiences. They sit and take notes. I realized that this characterized how I learned English in Taiwan, and that the AudioLingual Method (ALM) incorporates this Atlas Complex. ALM viewed language learning as the acquisition of correct habits learned through repetition and reinforcement. Maximum care was taken not to allow learners to make errors as they were evidence of bad habits. During drills, a premium was placed on error-free repetition, with no attention paid to whether or not learners understood the meaning of what they were saying. This, too, characterized my English learning experience in Taiwan.

On the other hand, in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), teachers were no longer simply the drill leader, but also provided students opportunities for communication to use the target language to interpret and express real-life messages. Good input needs to be comprehensible and meaning bearing, especially for beginners of second language learning. Beginners are like children in learning a new language. Simplified input with the characteristics of slower rate, high-frequency vocabulary and less slang, short sentences, familiar speech settings and repetition of scenarios help them
make sense of the new language. The modification of input enhances the availability of comprehensible input. Instructors can use drawings, photos, diagrams, objects, gestures, and other visual aids to accompany their speech as learners internalize and derive intake from the modified input they receive. Learners then recognize what they do or don't understand during the interaction and force themselves to reconcile and modify their interlanguage with psycholinguistic strategies. For beginners of second language learning, all these actions increase learners' comprehension in language learning. I was taught in the old and traditional way that did not include the development of speaking as a goal in learning a second language. No wonder I was not able to communicate with local people when I first arrived in the United States, for I had no experience with a contextualized environment to prepare for my communicative needs.

My understanding of CLT was further expanded when I read The Communicative Classroom by Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, and Mandell (2003), which explains that the communicative classroom aims to develop the goal of three modes of communication: interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational. Students must be able to use the language they have learned to "engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions and exchange opinions", to "understand and interpret written and spoken language" as well as to "present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners on a variety of topics" (p. 5). The research presented by Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, and Mandell shows students are able to develop their proficiency through communicative activities, such as task-based activities, which not only provide a contextualized environment but also engage students in a real-life setting. There are three components to a task-
based activity: (1) each task can be accomplished only by student effort in the target language, (2) activities must focus on the meaningful exchange of information from all participants, and (3) instruction must guide participants through a series of predetermined steps that allow students to complete tasks with all of the information gathered during their interactions. Task-based activities meet the goal of communicative language teaching which is, "to teach students to express themselves, understand others, and to request clarification or express lack of comprehension to others -- all in the [target language]" (Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mandell, 2001, p. 62).

According to Sung (2010), "communicative task is a key in CLT" (p. 705). Her 2010 research on "Promoting Communicative Language Learning through Communicative Tasks" resulted in positive outcome when she investigated if CLT-based projects are effective and suitable in second language teaching. Sung changed the curriculum and syllabus of her college-level Chinese course, modifying the grading elements by decreasing the percentages for paper-based homework assignments, quizzes, and examinations by adding "newly designed CLT-based projects including a video-making project, a blog project, a storybook-making project, weekly Chinese-English language partner meetings, and Chinese New year show" (p. 706). The results show that "participants used different strategies to exceed their current language level in attempts to convey meanings in the target language" (p. 712); learners made linguistic gains and were able to "communicate effectively and appropriately in a given context" (p. 712). Moreover, participants had fun when doing the CLT-based projects.
Nevertheless, practice does not always match theory. Implementing communicative language teaching is not without obstacles, especially in the cultural environment of collectivism. From the collectivist perspective, teachers are the authority who control and take charge in the classroom. Teachers are the leaders in the classroom. Students expect them to be the experts in their fields of study which results in the perception of teachers being the central figure in the classroom. Teachers are in command of the classroom; therefore, it is difficult for teachers to relinquish their role as the prime authority. In addition, teachers' beliefs play a critical part in applying CLT in the classroom.

As Mowlaie and Rahimi (2010) point out, L2 teachers' beliefs, shaped by "their educational and professional experience in their life" (p. 1525), are vital in what happens in the classroom because teachers make decisions on what to teach and how to teach it every day. Those beliefs are formed through their own learning experience, their personality, and their professional experience with what works best as well as the established practice and research findings. In their study, Mowlaie and Rahimi (2010) found high school teachers of English in Iran showed positive attitudes about CLT principles and welcomed the new approach, believing CLT brings positive effects on learners' communicative competence. However, implementing CLT was not favorable to learning in the Iranian context. Despite the fact that teachers had studied and become familiar with CLT method, they practiced the teaching method they were taught, grammar-based pedagogy, in the classroom. Besides lacking adequate professional training and teaching skills in implementing CLT, teachers did not feel the need to practice CLT as they did not believe CLT benefits students in
getting ready for the college entrance examination. Mowlaie and Rahimi observed 30 out of 100 teachers did not apply CLT principles in the classroom because of these beliefs.

In the similar manner, Spicer-Escalante & deJonge-Kannan (2014) point out reasons which discourage teacher from embracing CLT within their classroom, one being teachers cannot relinquish traditional practices. Teachers who are schooled in a teacher-centered classroom teach with the same beliefs and attitudes. They feel they have to give students tangible, explicit explanations of grammar rules, which lead to a teachers’ beliefs and misconceptions about CLT affecting the teachers’ ability to embrace CLT. Wong (2012) indicates “the majority of the participating teachers [in her research] admitted that they did not understand what exactly CLT meant” (p.1) therefore, they integrated the traditional methods in their communicative activities affirming the imperative of teachers’ perceptions and understanding of CLT to carry out effective communicative activities in the classroom.

Lack of support and the varying education system in each country also play important roles in CLT implementation in the classroom. Teachers often desire to implement CLT in their classroom, yet they may need trainings, textbooks, tools to synergize between the “reported beliefs and actual CLT practices (Wyatt, 2009, p.3). As reported in Wyatt (2009) “teachers have not been given the necessary tools for using CLT by teacher educators” (p.2). Abebe, Davison, & Biru (2012) find the same challenge and suggest “the university has to equip the departments with a lot of teaching materials facilities, experience sharing workshops and seminars to assist less experienced instructors to boost their commitent” (p.52) when applying CLT in the
classroom. In addition, students “often prefer traditional traditional approaches” (Spicer-Escalante & deJonge-Kannan, 2014, p.2439) due to practicing worksheets and drills. Memorization helps students obtain high scores in a competitive educational system.

I can understand the difficulty of implementing CLT in a competitive learning environment. Teachers need to meet the demand of the educational system, implementing methods that produce outcomes that satisfy parents and students. High-stakes testing skews the goal of language learning and forces teachers to alter their teaching styles. When the goal of learning a language is focused on getting students to obtain the best score, teachers generally practice grammar-based instruction to reach the goal. They tend to believe that drills make perfect. My niece in Taiwan participated in an after-school program and started learning English in the 2nd grade. At the beginning, CTL was implemented. She was very happy and enjoyed the games, story-telling, and role plays her teacher provided. She made such great progress that she was able to converse with her Dad's foreign clients in English. When she reached the 5th grade, however, the teachers changed the teaching method, starting to focus on grammar rules and accuracy of forms. Her teacher believed and agreed with many parents that it was time to prepare the students to adapt to the educational system in Taiwan, preparing for the "real test" when they entered middle school. She then studied and practiced the teacher's method which focused on grammar rules. As a result, my niece lost her confidence and ability to speak English.

In Gatbonton and Segalowitz’s (2005) paper entitled "Rethinking Communicative Language Teaching: A Focus on Access to Fluency", the authors also
point out that when teachers perceive "real teaching [is to] give students something concrete and tangible to go home with" (p. 327), they do not recognize the value of communicative activities. Such teachers believe that grammar rules, drills, and vocabulary lists are essential for second language learning. The teachers' focus then turns towards themselves and their needs to be a better teacher rather than students' need to communicate efficiently in real-life settings. They emphasize instruction of specific grammar structures, which affects their ability to embrace the CLT approach.

Gatbonton and Segalowitz presented an alternative method, ACCESS (Automatization in Communicative Contexts of Essential Speech Segments), to integrate the explicit explanation of forms into a CLT framework. The ACCESS method includes three phases: 1) creative automatization phase: learners engage in tasks where functionally useful utterances are used and elicited naturally and repeatedly, 2) language consolidation phase: instruction strengthens learner control of problematic utterances elicited and practiced in Phase 1, and 3) free communication phase: learners engage in a free communication activity or activities that deal with topics connected with those of the Phase 1. The goal of ACCESS is to "[promote] fluency by initiating and sustaining automatization in a manner compatible with a communicative approach to language teaching" (p. 345). It is a method of moving from communication to form-focused teaching and back to communicative task-based activities which "may be attractive to teachers who feel that traditional teaching techniques and procedure have a valuable place in their classroom" (p. 345).

Sometimes I wonder if there is one perfect method for language teaching. If it exists, it will make teaching easy but not practical. Language teaching is like
parenting; there is no owner's manual and it is not "one size fits all". As a teacher, I have to remember what students want in learning a second language. How do I help students achieve their goal of SLA, motivate them, and keep them interested in the learning process? With that in mind, I need to fully understand what CLT embraces, recognizing the true nature of CLT.

There are many resources and discussions to help teachers become true communicative language teachers. For example, Richard-Amato (1996) in her book *Making It Happen: Interaction in the Second Language Classroom From Theory to Practice* mentions that an interaction approach to pedagogy is an effective way to assist students in accomplishing their communicative competence. Learners acquire a second language by obtaining comprehensible input and then internalizing the input to become intake. Many activities such as total physical response (TPR), music, poetry, story telling, role play, and games can be planned to aid learners' cognitive process in developing their linguistic knowledge skills of language acquisition. These activities, designed to lower students' anxiety level, produce greater ego permeability, and motivate and encourage learners to interact in meaningful ways with teachers and peers, result in development of literacy skills and communicative competence.

This book has many activities that describe how to carry out communicative activities step-by-step. It also depicts the advantages/disadvantages of performing these tasks which are exceedingly helpful for a newly trained communicative language teacher. Sometimes I misunderstand the essence of CLT, trying too hard and spend too much time on activities. As Savignon (2006) comments in "Beyond Communicative Language Teaching: What's Ahead?": 
CLT is not concerned exclusively with face-to-face oral communication. It applies equally to reading and writing activities that involve readers and writers engaged in the interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning; the goals of CLT depend on learner needs in a given context. CLT does not require small group or pair work; group tasks have been found helpful in many contexts as a way or providing increased opportunity and motivation for communication. However, classroom group or pair work should not be considered an essential feature and may well be inappropriate in some contexts. Finally, CLT does not exclude a focus on metalinguistic awareness or knowledge of rules of syntax, discourse, and social appropriateness (p. 213).

I should continue studying the research and receiving training on how to implement CLT. In the end it is the teachers who draw from the methods make the language acquisition work in the classroom by combing many strategies (Richard-Amato, 1996). Only when teachers discover for themselves the best practices by research and experimentation to develop their own styles of teaching can learners move from comprehension to early speech production and eventually achieve communicative competence. Learners will then know how and when to use the second language appropriately.
The role of the language teacher

Teachers play a vital part in the classroom, especially foreign/second language teachers. Students encounter the non-native language with possibly different speech sounds, writing system, syntax, morphology, semantics, and pragmatics from their native language. The perception of what roles language teachers assume in the classroom significantly affects students' foreign/second language acquisition.

The roles of teachers have shifted over time. Until the late 1960s, traditional approaches were commonly used in language teaching, which made teachers assume the role of the authority figure who turned the classroom into a transmission-oriented classroom. In this kind of classroom, teachers were the authority, the center of attention, and the expert who dictates all actions, interactions, and explanations. Students were passive receptive vessels, taking notes, practicing drills, and memorizing grammar rules. Teachers did not interact with students; students did not interact with their teachers nor their classmates. Teaching methods that utilize the traditional approach make language learning laborious because it is artificial, uninteresting, and irrelevant to the students. In such a setting, students cannot make sense of meaning because the linguistic content has been broken into bits and pieces, is out of context, and contains no social values (Richard-Amato, 1996). For example, when I was dating my husband (boyfriend at that time), his mother asked me "What do your folks do?" I could not grasp the meaning until she rephrased it "What does your father do? What does your mother do?", then I realized she was asking about what my parents do for a living. Another example is many international students will go to a funeral home to look for apartments to rent, because
they see a pleasant-looking building and the word "home". These are instances of disconnection between the transmission-oriented classroom and real-life situation.

Since the 1980s, the practices of language teaching have moved to a different focus. Many researchers have reported that the first goal for students to study a language is to be able to speak the language, to get to know other people, and to learn about new cultures through those personal connections (Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mandell, 2003). Communicative language teaching (CLT) has been discussed and widely implemented since the 1990s (Prasad, 2013). The shift of methodology has changed the roles of language teachers. The teacher is no longer the sole person who shares knowledge and controls the classroom. Students are the focus, and teachers’ role is to design, plan, and facilitate a learning environment which meets students' communicative needs.

After taking many classes in the MSLT program, I realize the role of teachers has shifted from dictators to facilitators, yet teachers remain essential to students' success. But how do I help learners to pass the hurdles and motivate them to keep learning? How does the brain work when learning? What can teachers do to boost learning? The book Brain-Based Learning: The New Science of Teaching & Training by Eric Jensen (2000) answers my questions. The author points out our brain is designed for survival, not formal instruction. It does not learn on demand by a school's rigid schedule. Teachers should understand that high test scores do not mean personal success, and it is up to teachers to create a learning environment in which learners' brains will want to learn. Teachers should teach with many different learning styles so every learner is included. Teachers should enrich the learning environment, making the room rich and colorful as
well as complex and multi-sensory targeted. Teachers should add pictures, photos, and objects in the classroom, providing a visual learning environment. Teachers should give students opportunities to express themselves and interact with each other by participating in communicative activities such as role play, simulations, and real-life projects. Students learn more when interaction and participation are part of the learning process. Teachers should know that the temperature of the classroom, the value of water, the influence of smell, and nutrition all affect students' learning. Most importantly, if teachers "enforce learning in a particular way, the learner's brain may resist" (p. 16).

It is exciting for a teacher to try to master teaching skills. After I learned about communicative language teaching, it became my obsession. I sought diligently to understand how I can master designing and conducting communicative activities in the classroom. My focus was on activities, and I thought if I could give students communicative activities, I would be an effective language teacher.

Then I read the book Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice. In this book, Weimer (2002) points out that even though teachers care about learning and would like to teach in ways that promote it, teachers tend to focus mainly on developing their teaching skills. They believe that if they perform a good lesson, then learning automatically happens and produces good outcome. She reflects on her teaching experience and identifies the main factor which prevents students from doing well is the lack of confidence in the learning process. Students do not feel they are in control, therefore, they have self-doubt, feel awkward, and fear they will fail. She believes five areas need to change in order to provide learner-centered instructional practice: the balance of power, the function of content, the role of the teacher, the responsibility for
learning, and the purpose and processes of evaluation. Teachers in a learner-centered environment become designers, facilitators, and guides. They are not the sole performer anymore.

After reading Weimer's book, I remembered reading an article about the role change of teachers "Language and Literacy in the Borderlands: Acting upon the World through Testimonios" (Saavedra, 2011). The author emphasizes students have their own views of the world, languages, and identities. They should be encouraged and empowered by teachers to express themselves, explore with each other, and then connect themselves with others. However, children are often seen as "incomplete" and "uncivilized" who need adults' intervention to help them become independent, self-sustained, and controlled adults. The author then addresses that only when students speak of their understanding of the world and their shifting identities will the teacher know how the students negotiate meaning in their lives and what important skills they have learned from their families and communities. Teachers need to relinquish the authority as transmitters of knowledge and allow students to teach us their stories. At this time, "students become the center of knowledge and teachers become students" (Saavedra, 2011, p. 268).

This reminded me of some scenarios I observed at the English Language Center. Some volunteers treat adult learners as if they are children. The volunteers constantly look after the learners, watching every single act the learners carry out. The volunteers provide answers for the learners when the learners hesitate to respond. The volunteers even turn the pages for the learners. I understand the volunteers' eagerness to help, to
make connections with the learners. On the other hand, the volunteers need to trust and empower learners, believing their ability to learn and giving them opportunities to grow.

Kohn (2006) urges teachers to contemplate the students' needs from the point of view of psychological theory and research. In his book Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community, Kohn points out that autonomy, relatedness, and competence are universal human needs. Autonomy refers to "self-determination, the experience of oneself as the origin of decisions rather than as the victim of things outside one's control. Relatedness means a need for connection to others, for belong and love and affirmation" (p. 9), and "all of us take pleasure from learning new things, from acquiring skills and putting them to us" (p. 10). Teachers need to ask themselves what students' needs are instead of focusing on their own teaching techniques. When teachers create a learning environment which is comfortable and supportive, and when teachers stop lecturing and invite students to participate in planned activities, students benefit from such contextualized settings by involving themselves willingly and taking responsibility of their learning.

I agree with Kohn's view that teachers should relinquish authoritative control. Instead, teachers should ask themselves "what do students need?" and "how can I meet their needs?". This is important because the focus should be on students; therefore teachers should create a student-centered classroom that fosters trust and interaction. As Krashen (1986) claims, the best methods for second language acquisition are those that provide comprehensible input in low anxiety situations. Fear and nervousness can inhibit language acquisition, thus preventing students from assimilating input. Making the classroom a community cultivates a stress-free learning environment and creates the sense
of belonging which motivates students to participate. The more students participate in communicative activities, the greater their confidence in using the target language.

Language learning is not a linear process; it is not a step-by-step or one-size-fits-all process. Learners develop language skills through contexts offered in the classroom and outside the classroom. Gibbons (2002) provides examples and activities of four language skills in the classroom in Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning: Teaching Second Language Learners in the Mainstream Classroom. She identifies that productive class talk creates contexts for language learning and fosters second language development. Teachers should mindfully design the tasks, setting up group work which effectively supports language development. In writing, she suggests different ways to build knowledge of the topic is by building up a semantic web, developing a word wall/word bank, using picture and sentence matching, etc. Students then read the model report and work in pairs for a text reconstruction before they write their own texts. Since learners develop their language skills through reading, teachers need to carefully design activities which build a bridge into the text to reduce learners' difficulty which arises from the unfamiliarity of the text. Teachers should also pay attention to students' needs and interests, choosing books that motivate students to read. In addition, Gibbons indicates listening is a key to language development because students require an understanding of what is said to them and what the conversation means. Listening is an important model for language use. There are many activities which promote listening (and speaking), such as Map Game, interview, and information gap activities.

I am particularly fond of this book because I understand one of the roles of teachers is that of designers who plan meaningful communicative activities to help
students develop language skills. Since I am a new language teacher who received the traditional approach in learning a second language, I can use the activities described in this book and revisethem according to my students' needs.

One thing which helps language teachers teach more effectively is to understand what brain activities occur during the learning process. Teachers can structure lessons avoiding rote memorization, as well as engaging students in the process of learning to promote learning. Teachers can have students personalize information connecting students’ memories by stimulating their senses through activities to increase working memories and retrieve the memories through cues. These kind of lessons have personal meaning which can “lead to master” (Willis, 2006, p.20).

I enjoy reading this book. It also includes a chapter about how stress and emotion affect learning. As I previous mentioned in the Language Artifact: when learners experience anxiety or fear, the brain releases a chemical which disrupts brain cell development and impares learning ability. Teachers should use strategies to reduce stress and build a positive learning environment so students “gain emotional resilience” (p.57) and learn more efficiently.

In Murray & Christison’s (2011) What English language Teachers Need to Know Volume I: Understanding Learning, I comprehend how language structures work and where it applies to teaching. This includes identifying the lesson goal and letting students know “why they are doing what they are doing and how it will benefit them in their lives” (p.147). When I design lessons, I need to consider the fact that “people remember best the things that they learn most recently” (p.148) and “the new concepts that are taught intensively are more likely to be retained (p.149). Lesson design should
be meaningful and involve real-world interaction. I should also take into account that making mistakes is a part of the learning process and use positive reinforcement to provide a pleasant learning environment for students.

Furthermore, Hill & Flynn (2006) describe in detail what classroom instructions will work for English language learners. These instructions should work for the language teaching of other languages. The concept is the same. The first step to assess students’ readiness to learn the target language are 1) knowing the students and their levels of exposure to the target language, 2) their education background, and 3) the socioeconomic levels of their families. Allowing students to interact in a group enhances students’ understanding and learning with the use of nonlinguistic representations, cues, questions, and cooperative activities. Teachers then provide comprehensible, useful and relevant feedback by restating “what the students say using the correct grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary” (p. 31). Overall, this book provides research-based strategies and practices that work in the classroom. Language teachers should assess their students’ situations and implement the best practices of instruction to suit students’ needs. Spicer-Escalante & deJonge-Kannan (2014) emphasize that “it is the teachers’ responsibility to assess these methodologies and to make the necessary adjustments to better suit their local and national traditions while also responding to global needs (p. 2443).

Another essential aspect for language teachers is to teach pragmatics which are heavily embedded with in culture. Students need to be able to properly use the language in the context which contributes meaningful interactions without misunderstandings. Tatsuki and Houck (2010) in Pragmatics: Teaching Speech Acts state that each
language has information embedded in their society regarding the speech acts that are appropriate and inappropriate in different contexts. Different language and cultural backgrounds cultivate diverse beliefs and values; the social acts may be similar across cultures, but the linguistic means for carrying out such acts differ. If learners are unaware of suitable utterances in specific situations, the conversations between interlocutors may cause glitches and misunderstandings. Teachers need to be aware of the subjectivity in pragmatic choice that each culture brings, understanding the sociocultural norms in the target culture and cultural reasoning behind pragmatic norms.

Teaching pragmatics is imperative because culture affects what we do, hear, and say in daily interactions. Two years ago, I experienced the effect of cultural differences that caused misunderstanding of the speech act refusal between my husband's American culture and my Chinese culture. My husband's 20-year-old car would not start sometimes for some unknown reason. I had to go to his work and jump his car the day before the speech incident happened. That night, I offered to start his car before I went to work in case he needed me to jump it in the morning because I usually left for work before him. He told me "No, thanks". Nevertheless, I started his car in the morning anyway which made him angry about what I did. He expressed that I ignored him by not doing what he wanted. But I was operating in a Chinese cultural frame, in which ritual refusal is commonly used in invitations, suggestions, requests, and offers. It took several conversations back and forth between the two of us to establish the true intent of each person. The consequences of what I did for him on that wintery day proved the importance of pragmatics awareness. If the speakers do not share the same cultural
background, values, and beliefs, even though with good intention, misunderstandings can happen that may damage the relationship.

Teachers are also learners. Banner and Cannon (1999) identify the qualities of great teaching in their book *The elements of teaching*. They differentiate the core values of great teachers from competent teachers: diligence, enthusiasm, and willingness to learn and sacrifice. Banner and Cannon provide examples of becoming great teachers in the element of teaching -- learning, authority, ethics, order, imagination, compassion, patience, character, and pleasure. Teaching requires constant learning to gain knowledge, both personal and professional development. It is always a work in progress, never complete, and far from finished. Teaching also gives teachers the deepest satisfaction and fulfillment from nourishing others' minds and lives.

This book provides information about the identities and qualities of a great teacher. Teachers always seek to learn more and expand their ability to teach. I have asked my daughter, who is attending American high school, what she wants from her teachers. She indicates she needs caring and understanding teachers, who also respect her beliefs and values, and treat her as a student and an individual without judgement. She also wants her teachers to set high expectations while trusting her and believing in her. She loves instructional styles that engage the learners in activities.

The roles of teachers have changed, becoming those of a nurturer, designer, coach, and architect to maximize student involvement in tasks that relate to daily life (Kirkpatrick & Ghaemi, 2011) Teaching is a two-way process. Teachers provide guidance and lead students to develop knowledge and skills so students become
successfully functional individuals in return. I hope I will be able to apply what I have learned in the MSLT program and improve myself to become a great language teacher.
LOOKING FORWARD
Through my adulthood, I have been attending school non-stop. The four years of learning and training in the MSLT program have been the most fulfilling and satisfying experience I have ever had. This well-designed program helped me develop knowledge of second language acquisition, build up skills in communicative instruction, and expand my understanding of becoming an effective language teacher. It also supplied me with an alternative career path if I choose to be a language teacher when the opportunity arises.

I would like to explore the opportunity of being a Chinese teacher in the Dual Immersion Language (DLI) program. I have a great interest in this program because I enjoy working with children and am able to relate well to them. My experience of raising a daughter in American culture has given me an insightful perceptive and will greatly benefit me during interactions with children and their parents.

I will also consider teaching a lower-division Chinese course at Utah State University. My teaching experience of Chinese 1020 in Spring 2012 helped me apply theories into practice. After reflecting on my own teaching skills and styles, I know there are many methods, skills, and techniques I can apply to improve my Chinese teaching when the next opportunity occurs.

I plan to take classes for DLI program and continue attending conferences to share what I have learned and to learn what other teachers have practiced.
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