

Report on AAAL Presentation

I, Citing Li, completed my M.Ed. degree in Second Language Education from the University of Victoria in 2004 and my doctoral research in Applied Linguistics from the University of Hong Kong in 2009. I am currently an associate professor teaching advanced EFL learners at the College of English, Shanghai International Studies University, China.

My doctoral research explored the nature, patterns, conditions and constraints of Chinese EFL learners' pragmatic and discourse transfer in the situated discourse of requests by comparing the different pragmatic and discursive choices between the Chinese EFL learners and the English native speakers. The study adopted an ethnographic case study approach and found that EFL learners' transfer of pragmalinguistic and discourse strategies interacted with their sociopragmatic perceptions of the contextual variables in social interaction to varying degrees. In light of the findings, I called for efforts on explicit pragmatics instruction and systematic pragmatics strategy training in EFL classrooms and advocated respect for learners' subjective choice regarding which pragmatic forms to use in different interactional contexts.

Thanks to the AU Travel Award offered by David Nunan Institute for Language Education, I was able to present part of the findings from my doctoral research at the annual conference hosted by American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL) in 2010 in Atlanta. For the presentation titled "Idiosyncrasies in the Chinese EFL learners' pragmatic and discourse transfer of requests", I recruited 12 Chinese EFL learners and 6 native English speakers as participants. The data were collected through ethnographic interviews, ethnographic field notes, open role plays and recall protocol interviews. The ethnographic study spanned 1.5 years. The data analysis involved two stages. General pragmatic and discourse transfer categories emerged from the first stage. Based on these results, two EFL learners were then selected as typical cases for an in-depth investigation at the second stage, and they displayed qualitatively divergent patterns of pragmatic and discourse transfer. The study revealed that pragmatic and discourse competence may be premised on learners' pragmatic/discourse knowledge about sociocultural constraints, but competence may not necessitate awareness in all situations. Instead, learners' subjective, idiosyncratic choice for particular pragmatic and discourse strategies emerged as one of

the salient factors.

The audience showed great interest in the field of cross-cultural pragmatics and discourse that I presented and seemed to believe that it is a promising area in which further research is needed. Meanwhile, the comments, questions and criticism after my presentation helped me to think more critically about my research. For example, in the study, I asked the participants to role-play the simulated requesting scenarios first in English and then immediately in Chinese so that I could analyze how much transfer occurred from their L1 to L2 production. It turned out that some participants simply repeated what they said in the English role plays as "it was handy to do so". Some comments critiqued such methodological arrangements because this may reduce the validity of the role-play data. Other limitations in the use of role plays were also discussed and suggestions were made to collect real-life data as role plays were still considered as simulation that might not render authentic data. I was also asked to clarify some specifics, - for example, how the ethnographic interviews were conducted and how the two case participants were selected. Although my research was already completed at the point of presentation, these questions triggered me to reflect on how important the design at each step of data collection was to generate data that was both reliable and valid. At the end of my talk, one Ph.D. student shared her observation of how Greek people differed from Americans in their way of making requests in daily encounters. It was great to know people had such a shared interest in cross-cultural communication!

Through the interaction with the audience, I learned not only how to improve the methodological design, implement it in different research contexts, and address different research questions, but also how to critique, challenge and think from a different perspective. The opportunity to present at AAAL enabled me to realize that in becoming a researcher with passion, innovation and academic rigor, it is crucial to make efforts to stay actively engaged in the international academic community, to keep abreast of the *avant garde* research trends, and most importantly, to proactively interact and share thoughts with researchers in similar fields. AAAL is one of such wonderful platforms to help me realize these goals, and it is the AU Travel Award that has generously materialized them.

Thanks to all the constructive feedback at my AAAL presentation, I came up with

several ways to address the questions raised and managed to improve the design in my current research projects. Against the backdrop of the globalization trend in the cosmopolitan Shanghai, there has been a pressing need for universities to orient towards the goal of educating the university students with an international vision and perspective. The two-year-long project I am now working on aims to evaluate and improve students' intercultural competence in an EFL context, investigate how their cultural identity is formed over the language learning process and discuss how measures could be taken to improve classroom pedagogy and textbook design. Ethnographic interviews will be conducted with both the students and the teachers to gain an in-depth understanding of their beliefs and identity formation process. Other data collection methods may include classroom observation, learning journals, real-life data of cross-cultural communication, etc. Aside from qualitative data, the project will also incorporate quantitative design: students will be given pre-tests and post-tests of intercultural competence at the beginning and the end of each semester; intervention measures will be implemented in the teaching sessions to see if the learning results are significantly different.

As a result, the benefits of my AAAL presentation are far-reaching. I am proud to say that I am growing, along my own trajectory, into a researcher who is learning to embrace an open mind towards change and celebrate differences and diversity. As the inaugural recipient of the AU Travel Award, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the David Nunan Institute of Language Education once again for funding my trip and offering me this valuable learning opportunity!