Chinese Students perceptions of American English Teachers (ESL) in comparison with Chinese English Teachers (ESL)

Kaishan Kong, Delaney Cooley and Katherine Kocen | Language Department

ABSTRACT
This research observes the interaction between Chinese students and American Teachers in an English learning summer camp located in Chengdu, China. The main objective was to study Chinese student's perceptions of American English teachers including the advantages and disadvantages found in the teaching style differences between Chinese and American teachers. Observations were made throughout the classes taught by American teachers. Additional data was collected through one on one and group interviews with the Chinese students. The findings show that Chinese students find both American and Chinese teachers beneficial to their learning in different ways.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- Students ages 12 through 16
- The students came from underserved villages in China
- Many had never been to a large city before coming to Chengdu
- Many students also came from ethnic minority groups in China and spoke other languages in addition to Mandarin
- They had varying proficiency levels of the English language
- The students had a strong desire to learn English

TEACHING CLASSROOM
Within the classroom while teaching the American teachers utilized a variety of ways to help the Chinese students better understand the material being taught. Using hand gestures and body language the American teachers made it easier for the students to grasp the material. For example, one lesson taught was about weather and the activities that people commonly participate in during the different times of year. One activity, being explained, was making snow angels. To explain the term snow angel the American teacher laid on the floor an pretended to make the snow angel. This allowing the students to connect the activity with the action. In addition to body language the American teachers incorporated activities and games in the classroom to provide hands on learning. This involved having the students create their own scenarios and act them out in front of the class. Another teaching technique the American teacher used in the classroom was repetition. Having the student repeat the words and phrases to help commit them to memory.

INTEREST GROUPS
The American teachers assisted in leading various interest groups including drama, poster and music. Within these interest groups both teachers, American and Chinese, collaborated and created group activities that the Chinese students could choose from. The interest groups allowed the students to gain confidence speaking English and communicating in general.

PROCCESS
During a three-week English program summer camp the American teachers taught twenty-four Chinese students in two different groups separated by their English proficiency. The students had at least one class taught by an American teacher each day in the course of a week in addition to having classes taught by Chinese teachers. The camp consisted of eight teachers in total being American college students and the additional five being Chinese native speakers with high English proficiency. All the teachers involved in the camp were teaching on a volunteer basis without certified teaching license, there was however guidance from teaching professionals.

RESULTS
Students showed a preference for native English speakers teaching vocabulary, pronunciation and colloquial speech. The students found having the American teachers to assist with pronunciation to be the most helpful. In the classroom the American Teachers would say a word in English and the Chinese students would repeat the word several times to work on their pronunciation. The students showed a preference for American teachers teaching Grammar. They found that grammar points were easier for them to understand and apply if they were first explained in Chinese and since the American teachers only had minimal knowledge of the Chinese language therefore they were unable to explain the Grammar points. Also while conducting research the American Teachers noticed the differences in classroom atmospheres between Chinese and American teachers where the Chinese teachers were more instructive and the American teachers were more interactive with the students. Overall the research demonstrates that the students found both the Chinese and American teachers beneficial to their learning but with regard to different aspect of the language.

FUTURE RESEARCH
In the future it would be interesting to expand the research to include different groups of students including students from the city rather than from rural areas. Another aspect of the research could include American teachers, whose first language is English but that they are also fluent in Chinese. These variations in the Chinese students and American teachers could result in a similar or differing outcome from the current project.

REFERENCES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
We thank the Language Department, the International Fellows Program, One School non profit organization and research advisor Kaishan Kong.