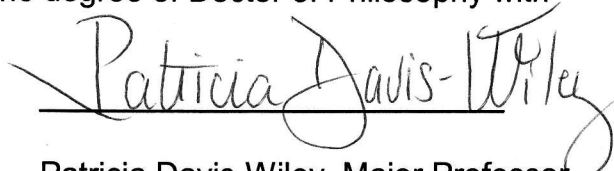


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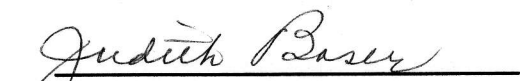


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**UT TAIWANESE GRADUATE STUDENTS' PERCEIVED
DIFFICULTIES IN ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC
PURPOSE SETTING**

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Tai-Ming Chen
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ABSTRACT

International students come from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds and encounter problems and challenges (Lee, 1997) when they first arrive at American universities. One of the reported challenges they encounter is speaking and listening skills in academic settings (Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Lee, 1997), which they perceive as being “serious impediments to full class participation” (Lee, 1997, p. 93) as international students. Being unable to clearly and accurately speak English may contribute to their discomfort and frustration in their daily routines and academic performance (Tsen & Newton, 2002).

The purpose of the present study was to examine speaking difficulties that Taiwanese graduate students perceive to experience in academic settings. Specifically, the research questions which guided this study were:

1. How comfortable do Taiwanese graduate students feel in academic situations in this study?
2. Of all international students’ perceived speaking difficulties, which ones are the most difficult as perceived by Taiwanese graduate students?
3. Which factors have a major impact on international students’ speaking performance in academic settings?

The participants in this study were the 40 Taiwanese graduate students (TGS) who matriculated at The University of Tennessee during the fall of 2008. Data collected from the subjects, using a survey, were analyzed using descriptive statistics and revealed the following results.

- The TGS felt more comfortable speaking English to their fellow students and instructors before or after class rather than in class.
- Leading class discussion, participating in large group discussions, answering questions in class, and giving presentations were in ascending order of difficulty.
- Cultural factors play a minor role in influencing TGS' willingness to participate in class activities; their general English speaking ability plays a more dominant role in engaging in class activities.

Essentially, the findings of the present study indicate that when TGS actively engage in task-oriented activities, they are more likely to interact with their fellow students and instructors, which in turn increases their level of comfort in belonging to and becoming full active participants in academic discourse communities.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of World War II, the number of international students has significantly increased in U.S. higher education from 30,000 in 1954 (Davis, 2003, p. 7) to 582,984 in the 2006/2007 academic year (Institute for International Education, 2007, ¶ 1). International students from Southeast Asia, who make up a relatively large proportion of international students in U.S. colleges and universities, have a significant impact on the host institutions. For example, with international students' presence on campus, the host institutions are more diverse and multicultural and domestic students are able to experience cross-cultural knowledge firsthand preparing them for entering the real world since schools are seen as a "microcosm of the large society" (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham 2001, p.18). Moreover, the enrollment of international students also encourages instructors to apply different approaches in teaching, which bring pedagogical change in academic settings (Kennedy, 2002). Additionally, while international students pursue their degrees in host institutions, they also serve various roles, such as Graduate Assistants (GAs), Teaching Assistants (TAs), and Research Assistants (RAs), that often boost the academic performance (e.g., increased number of academic papers) of the host institutions (Peterson, Briggs, Dreasher, Horner & Nelson, 1999), which in turn, help them increase their academic reputations.

International students come from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds and encounter problems and challenges (Lee, 1997) when they first arrive in American universities. To international students, their lives and experiences abroad are seen as very important life transitions when they return to their home countries. This transition may

accompany changes in several aspects of their lives, such as socio-cultural, environmental, and physiological adjustments (Chen, 1999). Along with this transition international students also encounter difficulties, such as language barriers, lack of knowledge of the host culture, difficulty in adapting to the host country's customs, unexpected academic norms, and new lifestyles. In addition, international students may also experience psychological difficulties, such as anxiety, sense of loss, loneliness, helplessness, and depression (Sam, 2001). Although American students may also have difficulties in adapting to a new culture, international students, however, have fewer resources and channels to resolve their stress and frustration issues in their first year of study (Cheng, Leong & Geist, 1994).

One of the reported problems is their speaking and listening skills in academic settings (Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Lee, 1997), the lack of which is seen as “serious impediments to full class participation” by international students (Lee, 1997, p. 93). Being unable to speak English proficiently may contribute to their discomfort and frustrations in their daily routines and academic performance (Tsen & Newton, 2002). In addition, the less time international students spend communicating with their fellow American students and professors, the less confident they will be in dealing with academic challenges and vice versa (Chen, 1999).

For most international students, prior to their study in the U.S., English was taught as a foreign language, which in many places in the world is mainly taught to help these students pass tests for entrance into a university. In addition, English teachers in general may place a heavy emphasis on reading and writing. An example of the tensions caused by this situation might be international students from Taiwan who consist of 4%

of the whole international student population in the US, ranking in 5th among all sending countries (Institute of International Education, 2007, ¶ 1). English has been taught in primary schools in Taiwan since 2001. Before 2001, Taiwanese students received English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education when they turned 13 years old. Because students learn English in a school setting, English is taught as an academic subject and is tested at all levels of entrance exams, such as high school, college, and graduate school entrance exams (Chern, 2002). Despite receiving instruction in English for a long time, it seems that being unfamiliar with the U.S. academic system and its cultural norms hinder Taiwanese students from class participation in American institutions (Samuelowicz, 1987).

Statement of the Problem

Some of us can speak good English, but most of us could not speak fluently when we first came. You felt embarrassed if somebody asks you ‘Pardon me?’ ‘Could you say it again?’ After a couple of times, you would rather close your mouth. If you have only limited vocabulary, you cannot have a large range of topics that you can talk about with others. You may know it, but you cannot express yourself. (Chen, 1999, p.2)

Coming from a non-English speaking country, this researcher and other international students, often feel stressful and frustrated when attending academic lectures and seminars as the quote above indicated (Tatar, 2005). This study described is actually an extension of this researcher’s previous school project. A year ago, he had an opportunity to conduct a class project regarding international students’ communicative competence in concert with two graduate students at The University of Tennessee. In this

study, the results showed that the participants in the study had their own strategies to cope with daily activities, such as talking to their American friends or having discussions with their peers. The results also indicated that international students are not always willing to participate in classes because they do not feel comfortable in speaking in a class. Yet, prior to being admitted to UT, they had taken English proficiency tests, such as the TOEFL or the GRE. This further suggests that English proficiency may not be the main cause that constrains their participation. Since language proficiency is not a primary inhibition, it is important to explore what other causes might prevent them from actually participating in class.

When the researcher browsed articles in the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) field, very few articles explored international students' speaking difficulties (Ferris & Tagg, 1996). It became clear that previous researchers, however, had addressed international students' learning on EAP writing (Basturkmen & Lewis, 2002; Leki & Carson, 1994), listening (Flowerdew & Miller, 1997; Read, 2002), curriculum needs (Allison, 1996; Burger & Chrétien, 2001), and students' academic needs (Deutch, 2003; Gulliver, 2001; Hyland, 1997). To international students, in order to participate in the academic community in which they are situated, being able to participate in class discussion and to orally communicate with their colleagues and professors, is considered an essential component in higher education. Therefore, there is a need to examine international students' perceived difficulties when speaking in academic settings and to bridge the communication gap between international students and professors in English-speaking academic environments.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine speaking difficulties that Taiwanese graduate students (TGS) perceive themselves experiencing in academic settings. In addition, this study aimed to investigate the impact of the following factors on TGS' speaking performance in academic settings.

- content-course instructors' awareness that being unable to orally participate in academic discourse in various disciplines involves several underlying factors rather than surface factors (e.g., cultural norms or length of residency).
- communication between international students and content-course instructors/academic advisors.
- curricula encouraging international students' speaking skills.

Significance of the Study

It seemed that when content course instructors mentioned East Asian students' difficulty with class participation, they often attributed to it a phenomenon called *cultural shock* (Lewthwaite, 1996, ¶ 1). Instructors might consider that their silence in class might be derived from their cultural norms which were different than those in mainstream America (Lee, 1997) or from non-linguistic factors, such as social networks (Liu, 2001). Although Ferris and Tagg (1996) identified international students' perceived difficulties in speaking and listening, their findings did not specifically explore international students' perceptions with regard to their academic performance. The significance of this study was twofold. One, there was a paucity of published literature examining this phenomenon. Second, in light of the fact the U.S. post-secondary institutions were pursuing internationalization as one of their missions (McBurnie, 2000), the results of

this research might provide content course instructors with information on how to accommodate international students' language difficulties so that they could become full participants in their academic communities. This, in turn, may potentially benefit the host institutions as a whole.

Assumptions

It is assumed that the selected international student subjects in this study (e.g., graduate students from Taiwan) would respond to the survey questions honestly and without bias. Furthermore, it was assumed that the selected research subjects will actively participate in this study since its purpose is related to international students' speaking difficulties and their subsequent entrance to and success in graduate coursework.

Limitations

1. The survey instrument was based on the subjects' self reports. Therefore, the researcher cannot guarantee the truthfulness of each respondent's answers.
2. This study used a quantitative design, using descriptive statistics to analyze data. Therefore, in-depth personal qualitative interviews were not conducted to explore all of the underlying causes of international students' perceived difficulties in speaking.
3. This study was also limited to the graduate students from Taiwan at one U.S. university. Therefore, the results may not be generalized to all colleges and universities in the U.S. or to other parts of the world. Therefore, this study simply represents a particular sample international graduate student population at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions were investigated in this study:

1. How comfortable do Taiwanese graduate students feel in academic situations in this study?
2. Of all international students' perceived speaking difficulties, which ones are the most difficult as perceived by Taiwanese graduate students?
3. Which factors have a major impact on Taiwanese graduate students' speaking participation in academic settings?

Definitions of Terms

The following terms and these definitions are used in this study.

Acculturation

It refers to a process in which an individual from one culture adopts the beliefs and behaviors of another culture. It is also known as cultural change (Kagan & Cohen, 1990).

Communicative Competence

Introduced by Dell Hymes (1971), the original idea is that speakers of a language have to have more than grammatical competence to communicate effectively in a language; they also need to know how language is used by members of a speech community to accomplish a purpose. Communicative competence consists of four areas of competence: linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic.

Comprehensible Input

The learner must understand the message that is conveyed. Comprehensible input is a hypothesis first proposed by Krashen (1981), and refers to the fact that

students should be able to understand the essence of what is being said or presented to them in order for comprehension to take place.

Co-Construction

It refers to the concept that students gain knowledge through continuous communication. In the process of interaction, students co-construct the ideas to achieve the desired goal by answering and asking questions (Jacoby, 1995).

Cultural Shock

It refers to the anxiety and feelings when people move into a new culture that is entirely different from the home cultural or social environment, such as a foreign country. This term expresses the “lack of direction, the feeling of not knowing what to do or how to do things in a new environment, and not knowing what is appropriate or inappropriate” (Lewthwaite, 1996, ¶ 1).

Discourse Community

A discourse community is a group of individuals bound by a common interest who communicate through approved channels and whose discourse is regulated...[The community] shares assumptions about what objects are appropriate for examination and discussion, what operating functions are performed on those objects, what constitutes ‘evidence’ and ‘validity,’ and what formal conventions are followed (Porter, 1986, p. 38-39).

Domestic Students

Domestic students are those students who were born in the country where international students are living. This term refers to American students in this study.

EAP

EAP stands for English for Academic Purposes, which suggests teaching and training international students to use English appropriately in U.S. higher education classroom environments.

ESL

English as a Second Language. In this study, it refers to two usages. One is teaching English to a student/person whose native or primary language is one other than English. The other one refers to the use of English in an academic setting for the purpose of communication in an English-speaking community.

Fossilization

When learning a second language, it is rare for second language (L2) learners to achieve full native-like competence, and Selinker (1972) refers to this phenomenon as “fossilization” (Selinker, 1972, p. 27).

Host Institutions

In this study, it refers to colleges or universities where international students pursue their degrees outside of their home countries.

Interactional Competence

Interactional competence involves knowing and using the mostly-unwritten rules for interaction in various communication situations within a given speech community and culture. It includes knowing how to initiate and manage conversations and negotiate meaning with other people. It also includes knowing what kinds of body language, eye contact, and proximity to other people are appropriate, and acting accordingly (Kramsch, 1986).

Integrative Motivation

Integrative Motivation refers to an interest in learning another language because of “a sincere and personal interest in the people and culture represented by the other language groups” (Lambert, 1974, p. 98).

Interlanguage

According to Selinker (1972), language learners construct their own rules and speak a language that is neither the target language (TL) nor their native language. This interlanguage consists of a series of strategies that helps them communicate and learn the target language (Selinker, 1972).

Instrumental Motivation

Instrumental motivation refers to an emphasis on the “practical value and advantages of learning a new language (Lambert, 1974, p. 98).

L2 Speakers

This refers to speakers of a language other than their first or native language.

LPP

Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP) refers to a theoretical description of how newcomers become experienced members and eventually old timers of a community of practice or collaborative project. According to LPP, newcomers become members of a community initially by participating in minute and superficial yet productive and necessary tasks that contribute to the overall goal of the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Newcomers

People who come from another country or into a new community. In this study, this term refers to international students.

Productive Skills (Also known as Expressive Language Skills)

Productive skills refer to ESL learners' speaking and writing skills. These skills necessitate the process of creating language.

Recast

Recast is considered as "a target like way of saying something that was previously formulated in a non-target like way" (Mackey, 1999, p. 561) as the conversation shown below. ESL learners use recasts to avoid negative effects, such as communication breakdowns.

Speaker A: Before John *will leaves* the classroom

Speaker B (recast): You mean, before John *leaves* the classroom

Receptive Skills

To become a full participant in a given academic environment, ESL speakers learn how to master English by learning four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In this study, receptive skills refer to ESL speakers' listening and reading skills.

Scaffolding

Scaffolding is used as a metaphor to describe the type of assistance offered by a teacher or peer to support learning. In the process of scaffolding, teachers provide assistance when learners are not able to complete their tasks. It is widely used in second language learning, where teachers help ESL learners go beyond their

abilities and to reach their desired goal. If scaffolding is properly administered, it will “act as an enabler, not as a disabler” (Benson, 1997, p. 126).

Social Capital

Social capital refers to the friends, contacts, and connectedness of an individual to other individuals. Social capital can be considered as the resources available to a person through that person’s sphere of personal contacts (Bourdieu, 1986). In this study, the concept is instrumental, focusing on the benefit of individuals who are involved in personal relations or participation in social groups (e.g., interaction between *American students and international students*).

Social Distance

Social distance describes the distance between different groups or levels of society. It refers to the cognitive and affective proximity of two social cultures that an individual encounters (Brown, 1980).

Social Identity

Social identity is “the individual’s self-concept derived from perceived membership of social groups” (Hogg & Vaughan, 2002, p. 23).

Target Language

It refers to a language that learners are trying to learn in addition to their native language.

ZPD

ZPD stands for Zone of Proximal Development and is defined as

“The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as

determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

Organization of the Study

The study is organized into five chapters that are followed by references, a bibliography and appendices.

Chapter 1 consists of an Introduction, a Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Significance of the Study, Assumptions, Limitations, Research Questions, Definition of Terms, and Organization of the Study.

Chapter 2 reviews presents a review of pertinent literature which provides the historical and theoretical framework for the research study.

Chapter 3 includes the research method, the instrument used for collecting data, and the procedures followed for analyzing the data in this study.

Chapter 4 reports the results of the study’s data analysis.

Chapter 5 presents a summary of results and conclusions of the study, followed by implication and recommendation for further research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

According to Open Doors in 2006, the number of international students enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions was 582,984 (Institute for International Education, 2007, ¶ 1). Many will spend years on a campus working on their degree. When they first arrive, they need not only to adapt to the culture shock and loneliness but also be ready to meet the academic challenges they will encounter in U.S. classrooms (Thorp, 1991). Most international students are required to take an English proficiency test, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and/ or the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) before being admitted to American universities. Even for most international students who meet the basic minimum score requirement for admission to graduate studies, there is sometimes a great gap between their linguistic knowledge and their overall communicative competence (Ballard, 1996; Liu, 1998). According to Ferris & Tagg (1996), international students encounter academic difficulties in orally participating in classroom discussion.

An early study conducted by Ostler (1980), regarding international students' academic needs, indicated that ESL students' expectations vary based on their majors. Students express concerns over their ability to complete degree requirements because their confidence sharply decreases if they do not perform well in academic settings (Ying, 2003). These findings suggest that they may lack oral proficiency due to the fact that they had not previously had specific classes that would enhance their listening and speaking abilities in English (Ostler, 1980, Ferris & Tagg, 1996).

A similar survey was conducted by Johns (1981), who surveyed ESL instructors and students about the importance of speaking and listening skills in English. While most students in John's study state that their receptive skills (i.e., reading and listening) are more important than productive skills (i.e., writing and speaking), Johns concludes that more specific language courses and activities are needed to improve their communicative competence. Liu (1998) also notes that perceived language deficiency has been a great concern for international students.

In the following discussions, the researcher will review studies pertaining to international students' speaking difficulties. First, he will discuss international students' concept of discourse community in relation to their speaking proficiency. Then, the researcher will explore how Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept relates to international students' lack of oral participation and review some reported factors influencing their oral participation. Lastly, the researcher will discuss previous findings facilitating international students' oral proficiency.

Discourse Community

Swales (1990) defines a discourse community as "a group that is connected in some kind of orderly way to reach a common goal" (p. 26). In order to become an active member of this group, all members must become familiar with the academic expectations in post-secondary education in the U.S. For international students, in particular, the only way that they can show their level of content area knowledge or expertise is by becoming members of two discourse communities, one through their oral performance and the other through their written performance.

Flowerdew (2000) focused on the challenges that confront international students or scholars specifically entering academic written discourse communities. When international are enrolled in U.S. academic institutions, content instructors expect nonnative English speakers (NNES) as well as native English speakers (NES) to meet the requirements set for the entire community (Ferris & Tagg, 1996). Despite having similar expectations, as members of the same academic discourse communities, compared with NES, NNES spend more time in preparing themselves for full, active participation in various academic activities, such as giving academic presentations and leading or participating in group discussions (Morita, 2004).

Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that in order to participate in a discourse community, international students (newcomers) must learn how to engage in discourse activities, such as initiating academic interactions with NES peers and observing the practice of domestic fellow graduates in academic settings. Language learners acquire linguistic and sociocultural knowledge when they are immersed in the sociocultural contexts ranging from school to work (Ochs, 1988). Morita (2004) suggests that interacting with NES and practicing the cultures in a given discourse community constructs L2 speakers' identities. During the process of gaining practice, L2 speakers develop their identities through negotiation of perceived difficulties on academic tasks and "their changing sense of competence as a member of given classroom community" (p. 583).

When participating in academic presentations (APs) for example, in order to perform well in front of the class, international students learn how to present topics through collecting materials, rehearsing and preparing Powerpoint slides. Because

international students might not be familiar with these academic presentations before they were enrolled in U.S. institutions (Cheng, 2000), they spend a lot of time preparing for their first APs. Presumably, they might have difficulties meeting content instructors' expectations. However, NNEs receive peer support during the process of engaging in the academic activity in the particular academic community, which in turn, gradually improves their language ability and allows them to evolve from being novice members to full participants of the community (Kobayashi, 2003). As Lave and Wenger (1991) note, "learning to participate in the activity is not merely a condition for membership, but is itself an evolving form of membership" (p.5).

Based on Lave and Wenger's model of community of practice, Haneda (1997) investigated how this model affects adult English learners in a Japanese as a Foreign Language (JFL) setting. She discovered that the participants learn how to engage in class participation through observation and consider it a type of social practice. Haneda's findings also indicate that in order to understand students' lack of participation, researchers or educators need to incorporate Vygotsky's (1987) theory of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). According to this theory, students who are gently inducted into a comfortable learning situation, tend to learn more easily than those students who are not. Thus, if L2 speakers are able to meet challenging tasks in a particular academic venue, they feel comfortable in this community and tend to gain confidence in meeting even more challenging academic tasks in that setting. Haneda (1997) concludes that teachers play an essential role in helping students speak up in the classroom.

Regardless of their ethnicity or nationality, graduate students need to adapt to a new academic community (Morita, 2000). When graduate students (both domestic and international) enroll in a new program, they also carry a new identity. For international students, their identity may be even more complicated because it is mixed with their own cultural backgrounds and preconceptions of the new academic community. However, by participating in academic activities, their identity is positively reinforced, which in turn, allows them to feel more comfortable participating in the academic community, thus increasing their language ability. For example, in order to give a successful academic presentation, international students need to observe and pay close attention to their fellow graduate students. During the process of acquiring knowledge in academic settings, international students are simultaneously negotiating their native cultures, beliefs, and ethics with those of domestic students (Morita, 2004). When their language skills improve through language socialization experiences with their fellow graduate students, they feel that they can freely contribute their own knowledge to the new academic community they are situated in. Consequently, international students' perceived identity is re-defined. As Morita argues, "negotiating identity is situated" (p. 596).

Second Language (L2) Speakers' Willingness to Participate in Academic Setting

In order to receive and exchange knowledge in an academic setting, it is necessary for all students(including international) to use four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Previous research has focused on various aspects of language learning, including listening to lectures and instructions (Cammish, 1997; Constantinides, 1992); asking questions (Ferris & Tagg, 1996); speaking during class discussions (Kao & Gansneder, 1995) and presentations (Light & Wan, 1991); and writing papers and exams

(Canseco & Byrd, 1989; Crowe & Peterson, 1995). However, few studies have examined factors that might potentially inhibit international students from speaking in academic settings.

The reason that international students fail to engage in a class discussion in a mainstream English-speaking environment is because they may not feel comfortable in doing so. Yashima (2002) points out that the underlying factors that influence international students' willingness to communicate also influence their L2 proficiency. In Yashima's study, she measured L2 learners' willingness to speak in class using a Willingness to Communicate (WTC) model. This model, developed by McCroskey (1992), was first used in first language (L1) communication and then was applied to L2 communication by MacIntyre and Chément (1996). Her findings suggest that international students' motivation affects their self-confidence which to some degree determines their willingness to participate in class activities.

MacIntyre (1994) proposed a path model indicating that L2 speakers' willingness to communicate is based on two major factors: perceived communication competence and communication anxiety. According to MacIntyre, L2 speakers tend to frequently examine their status in their own minds. That is, when they interact with NESs, they are concerned about whether they are able to continue an ongoing conversation with them. When they perceive their level of communication competence may not allow them to fully participate in a conversation with the NESs, their willingness to engage in the task decreases. According to MacIntyre, their perceived competence may derive from their personality and self-esteem.

Based on MacIntyre's study, it could be inferred that introversion influence L2 speakers' willingness to communication. Wen and Clément (2003) study illustrates MacIntyre's viewpoint using cultural origins. They suggest that in an academic setting, Chinese students tend to seek emotional security, affiliation with groups, and approval from the public. When these criteria are met, Chinese students feel more emotional secure to communicate in a classroom setting. However, in most cases, Chinese students may not be able to establish the relationship with their peers, which may decrease their motivation to communicate in academic settings.

Ying (2002) also points out that extroverted international students are more likely to associate with American students than introverted international students; this in turn increases L2 speakers' interactions with native speakers, which subsequently may increase their language proficiency. Ying's findings were corroborated in an empirical study conducted by Furukawa, Sarason, and Sarason (1998) who investigated the relationship between international exchange high school students' extroverted attitudes and cross-cultural affiliations. They found that to some extent, international students' extroverted attitudes may have contributed to their increased interactions with native speakers, which ultimately facilitated an increase in their L2 fluency.

International students' attitudes also lead to a concern about the frequency of interacting with domestic students. One aspect they strive for is to meet the content course instructors' academic expectations. Edwards and Ran (2006) report comments from one Chinese student, "I have got so much work to do, so much reading" (p. 13). It is inferred from his words that international students primarily focus on their academic work (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) and don't feel that they have the time to socialize or

engage in interactions with domestic students. Consequently, they spend less time relaxing and socializing and may not be satisfied with their total college experience. As Dozier (2002) points out, international students' lack of participation in campus-related activities influences their academic and personal development, which in turn diminishes their interaction with their domestic counterparts.

Although English proficiency is a strong predictor of academic achievement and English effectiveness, an extroverted attitude is considered to be a strong predictor of success in interactional dimensions (Yashima, 1995).

Potential Factors That May Impact International Students' Willingness to Oral Participate in Academic Settings

Cultural Beliefs

The following literature addresses some alleged cultural factors that may contribute to international students' lack of oral participation in academic settings, including cultural beliefs, cultural adaptation, anxiety, motivation, perceived isolation, and socio/academic relationships. To some extent, culture plays a role in academic oral participation, especially for international students in their early years of graduate study.

Bohn (2004) attributes a lack of participation to cultural influences. In her study, she observed Japanese students' classroom behaviors and their interactions with their instructors. She suggests that Japanese and American students express their interest in a foreign classroom discussion in different ways than in their first language classroom settings. For example, traditionally, in a Japanese school setting, in order to show students' respect for teachers, students rarely raise questions or express their opinions. Morita (2004) adds that they will try to avoid embarrassment by not asking questions. As

Bohn points out, students are “considered subordinate and their teachers are considered superior” (Bohn, 2004, p. 3).

Cultural Adaptation

Education in Asian countries tends to emphasize the importance of memorization, repetition, drilling, and testing (Liu, 1998) rather than open classroom discussions. Several studies were conducted investigating international students’ learning difficulties with regard to their cultural adaptation to the new target language. For example, Burrell, Kim & Barlett (1998) examined Korean students pursuing academic degrees in the United States. They conclude that when teaching, content instructors tend to put more emphasis on the *how* or *why* instead of focusing on theories or paper-oriented ways about technical subjects. Domestic students raise questions when they encounter learning difficulties while Korean students remain silent (Wen & Clément, 2003).

On the post-secondary level in the U.S., content instructors encourage undergraduate or graduate students to actively participate in classroom discussions and offer personal comments. In a question-answer scenario, what prevents students from answering is that they are not sure about the instructors’ desired answers. Scarcella (1990) reports that unlike American students, who answer questions quickly, and sometimes by merely guessing, Asians, whose culture places a high value on reflective thinking, show respect for teachers by only giving answers that have been carefully thought-out. Often, they wait until they are sure about the answers before speaking out (Liu, 2001).

Andrew and Dekkers (1999) and Anyanwu (2000) report that L2 speakers’ lack of participation may result from their different perception of group work. According to

these researchers, the direct confrontation that takes place in a group discussion is greatly valued by Americans, whereas harmony among group participants is appreciated by Asian international students. Thus, when discussing an assigned topic in class, while an American student might give his/her comments on a topic, international students tend to reserve their opinions, assuming that since their comments are different from their fellow classmates, they may not be perceived favorably. The principle of harmony for Asians also applies to writing. Nelson (1997) suggests that when editing writing in peer groups, Chinese students are more concerned about maintaining group harmony than about actually giving critical comments on the papers. American students, on the other hand, tend to use peer editing as a way to improve their writing skills.

In addition, a study conducted by Nakabayashi and Nagao (1994) suggests that in contrast to American' students' belief that knowledge is obtained through direct communication through various verbal strategies, such as questions or comments, Japanese students prefer using indirect, vague, and informal expressions. Yamada (1997) notes that:

The goal in American communication is for each individual to speak up for him/herself, and to express messages in as explicit a manner as possible. In contrast, the goal in Japanese communication is for members of a group to depend on each other to talk about shared experiences, and to express messages in as implicit style as possible. (p.4)

While the previous studies explore international students' lack of participation based on the notion of cultural beliefs and cultural adaptation, Tudor (1998) asserts that language learning is a complex process; thus, it should not be predicted and generalized

based on assumptions about cultures. Melles (2004) also suggests that cultural differences may have some explanatory power, but they are not sufficient to support differentiating between native and non-native English speakers' learning styles. Therefore, the overgeneralization of descriptions of learning styles and comparison of Western and Eastern cultures may not wholly explain international students' lack of participation in class. As Kingston and Forland (2008) argue, "oversimplistic comparison on Confusion and Socratic traditions is decreasing and needs to be further explored" (p. 207).

Anxiety

Tsui (1996) investigated the perception of potential factors that may contribute to students' silence in the classroom, based on a study of 38 ESL secondary teachers enrolled in a postgraduate certificate in an education program at the University of Hong Kong. Tsui (1996, p. 130) identified five main factors that may result in students' reluctance to openly participate in class discussions: (1) students' low English proficiency; (2) students' lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes; (3) the teachers' dislike on fear of silence; (4) the teachers' unequal allocation of turns, and (5) unclear instruction from the teacher. Tsui concludes that in order to overcome students' reticence, teachers need to implement various strategies, such as accepting a variety of answers or giving positive feedback, to minimize students' learning anxiety. One teacher points out in the study, "our aim should be that students feel as comfortable and fear-free as possible..." (p. 165).

Liu (2000) conducted a similar study and found that in addition to anxiety, he was able to identify 110 factors among 20 participants across four major clusters of oral classroom participation modes. He subsequently categorized them into five major

categories, including socio-cultural, linguistic, cognitive, pedagogical, and affective factors. His findings suggest that the interplay of these factors influence ESL learners' real-life communication in content courses. He reports that of all the factors that influence participants' oral participation modes, socio-cultural and affective factors are the most salient in "shaping participants' negative perception toward oral classroom participation" (p. 175).

Social Network

It is not unusual for international students to encounter homesickness and cultural shock when they begin living in the United States (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Establishing friendship networks with native speakers is a critical factor in determining how well international students are able to live in the host country, and language skills play a vital role in the process of increasing international students' social networks and academic performance (Marion, 1986). Prior to international students' arrival in the host country, they show a desire and expectations to form friendships with native speakers (Smart, Volet & Ang, 2000). Furnham and Alibhai (1985) argue that what motivates them to form relationships with domestic students is that a strong social group helps them adapt to foreign life more easily. However, when they attempt to interact with domestic students, they encounter great difficulties meeting the latter's expectations, which may derive from the former's lack of communicative competence (Liu, 1998).

Perceived Isolation

Although previous research has suggested that active engagement in school-related activities leads to international students growing and learning, many minority groups have reported that they perceive they are unwelcomed and are treated like

strangers (Uba, 1994). A similar finding was suggested by Shabahang's (1993) study which surveyed American students attending three community colleges and found that 83% said they did not do things with international students outside of the college setting (p. 134). The findings also indicate that international students' interactions with domestic students is rare which results in their lack of satisfaction with social networking and the community. Wierzbicka (1997) reports, however, that domestic students could greatly benefit from interacting with international students, and gain new insights into another culture by their interaction with them.

With regard to a specific cultural group, Alreshoud and Koeske (1997) report that over 80% of American students "seldom" or "sometimes" talk to students from the Middle East (p. 239). Despite the so called *Melting Pot*, most Americans value what the majority in a society value (i.e., *social capital*). Social capital is defined as "relationships with individuals who are able and willing to provide, or negotiate the provision of, institutional resources and opportunities" (Trice, 2004, p. 672). For most people, international students are considered a group of people who may not be able to provide their domestic counterparts with the resources and opportunities that the society values. Consequently, American students may not be willing to initiate interaction with international students.

The impact of the perception of social capital is evident when choosing members for a group project within international students' presence. American students may choose non-minority cultures for their project members rather than members of a minority culture, because they may think that minority groups lack adequate social capital, which could result in a their group project's failure. International students, thus,

may be left out and end up working with other international students, which diminishes their opportunities for interacting with American students, which in turn, discourages their participation. Leaving international students out might also lead to a situation where international students form negative impressions about their American counterparts who may not be willing to befriend with them (Mestenhauser, 1983).

This perceived isolation is not solely limited to international students in the United States. It also occurs within different ethnic and racial groups, including Hispanic Americans. Evens (2004) reports that Hispanic and American Indians in post-secondary nursing programs experience racism and isolation from the host culture, and lack of support from teachers may negatively impact their academic success. Similar findings of perceived discrimination are also found in Novera's (2004) study, which suggests that Indonesian postgraduate students also experienced discrimination and racism in Australian universities.

Consequently, when international students feel socially isolated, they might become reluctant to acculturate to the target culture, and may be dissatisfied with their academic environment which may potentially result in infrequent interaction with domestic students.

Academic/Social Relationships

With respect for the impact of student-faculty relationships on international students' willingness to interact in academic settings, one international student reports that compared with teachers in China, his teacher pays less attention to him and does not care about him, as he states:

My lecturer doesn't care if I pass or fail, I came from China at my own expense because I want to learn. But he treats me as a nuisance when I try to ask questions in class. He avoids me. I try to catch him after the class and he is always in a hurry...and he won't help me. (Edwards & Ran, 2006, p. 10)

Previous studies suggest that positive student-faculty relationships have a significant impact on students' academic performance and socialization in academic settings (Terenzini et al., 1984). Professors consider acculturation rather than accommodation as "the preferred way to integrate international students into American classroom" (Smith, 1998, p. 28). Smith (1998) indicates that when international students feel more comfortable with the host cultures, they are more likely to receive social support from both domestic and international students. Social support is seen an important link to international students' respective disciplines because it motivates newcomers when they have encounter difficulties participating in class activities. Psychologically, when international students perceive a feeling of indifference from their instructors and peers, they might avoid seeking help from them, which could negatively impact their academic performance in that classroom setting.

Although it is essential to review this perceived indifference toward international students, it is more important to examine some of the underlying factors of this existing phenomenon. Some of the perceived indifference may derive from a misunderstanding of the academic culture present in Western and Eastern countries. For example, in Southeast Asia, a teacher is considered an authoritative figure, who provides knowledge, is willing to answer students questions under any circumstance (Chan, 1999), and acts as a personal mentor as well as educator and disciplinarian (Biggs & Watkins, 2001). Consequently, in

order to show respect for teachers, Chinese students tend to ask questions *after* class because they consider asking questions *in* class a waste of the teachers' as well as other students' time during class (Flowerdew & Miller, 1995). When they ask questions after class, they still maintain a hierarchic distance between teachers and students. Students believe that it is the teacher's role to initiate questions, not the students' role. Chinese students maintain this hierarchy for the rest of their lives (Watkins, 2000). Thus, when they study overseas, they transfer this perception of appropriate interaction from their home country to the host country (Biggs, 1994).

Unlike the academic culture in Southeast Asia, Westerners consider the teacher's role as being initiative (Aspland, 1999). Consequently, teachers initiate questions and encourage students to actively join in class discussions. It is assumed that the purpose of teaching is to instruct students how to get knowledge instead of teaching the students knowledge (Gieve & Clark, 2005). In Western academic culture, instructors view their use of time after class differently than do instructors in Southeast Asia. For example, one Chinese student notes that, "If I want to see my teacher on a certain day..., you have to make an appointment." In China, you simply say, "I have a problem. Can I see you?" (Edwards & Ran, 2006, p. 15). However, the same situation is interpreted differently, as one instructor at United Kingdom reports that, "You work really hard to get the response in the whole group situation and then you've got a whole string of people waiting outside your door" (Edwards & Ran, 2006, p. 17). Presumably, students from a different academic culture may negatively interpret the students' words as stated above, which affects international students' satisfaction with instructors (Carini, Kuh, & Zhao, 2005).

Smith (1998) suggests that a potential approach to increase international students' willingness to become actively involved with academic communication is to pay attention to international students' affective needs, such as accommodating international students' learning styles. This can be a challenge since international students are forced to adapt to the participative (i.e., Western culture) learning style (Ladd & Ruby, 1999) to which they are not accustomed.

In addition to accommodating international students' learning styles, U.S. instructors may need to examine their own pedagogical methods which may not be favored by international students (Liu, 2001). Yet, in most American universities, content course instructors may be compelled to follow department requirements and ignore what international students expect in relation to teaching methods (Benesch, 2001). Trice (2004) comments that instructors who have international teaching experience are more likely to modify their teaching styles by using less jargon or incorporating visual aids in the lectures for international students than instructors with less experience with this population. By doing so, international students will be likely to accelerate their academic adjustment and lessen their difficulties in meeting academic requirements (Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas, 2000).

Previous Findings on the Relationship between Oral Proficiency and Interaction with Native Speakers

Interaction and Second Language Learning

Interaction with native speakers may contribute to second language learners' (SLLs) language development (Bialystock, 1981; Leeman, 2003; Long, 1983; Mackey, 1999). According to Long's (1983) interaction hypothesis in conversation, L2 speakers

receive signals that they have difficulty interpreting. For example, L2 speakers may ask interlocutors to repeat some words so that they can interact with their listeners and in turn, facilitate their comprehension (Wesche, 1994). In the process of negotiated communications, SLLs may receive recasts, reformulated correct responses to mistakes (Carroll & Swain, 1993; Ellis, 1990), from their interlocutors. Listeners, in turn, provide various opportunities to help SLLs convey their meaning. In addition, when SLLs are conversing with native English speakers (NES), SLLs are able to scaffold their lexical knowledge (Long, 1996). For L2 speakers, lexical knowledge plays an important role in building up SLLs' proficiency. The reason lies in the fact that when L2 speakers encounter difficulties in word choice, they may have problems in expressing their intentions. However, the difficulties of choosing appropriate words can be overcome by repeating what their interlocutors have used, that is, to imitate native speakers' use of words to have the conversation understood.

Another positive attribute of interacting with native speakers is that native speakers may give comments or feedback to L2 speakers, which may potentially improve their speaking proficiency (Mackey, 2002). For example, when feedback is given in an interactive small-group discussion, L2 learners are led to produce more complete speech (Panova & Lyster, 2002), which in turn facilitates their proficiency. Therefore, pedagogically, researchers' findings on speaking proficiency (Mackey, 2002) and interactive small-group discussions (Panova & Lyster, 2002) can be implemented in the academic settings where content course teachers provide feedback or content knowledge to help ESL students perform various academic tasks such as giving presentations or answering questions.

In addition to the positive effects on L2 development, Long (1996) argues that for L2 learners, interacting with native speakers also serves various purposes, such as receiving feedback and allowing them to notice gaps in their interlanguage. When L2 learners are provided with recasts during communicative interaction, their performance is better (Leeman, 2003), which confirms Long's (1983) argument that interacting with native speakers enhances L2 learners' oral proficiency.

Even though previous research implies that interacting with native speakers promotes L2 learners' language development, researchers (e.g., Leeman, 2003) mainly focus on the effects of the interaction hypothesis on L2 learners instead of focusing on L2 learners' own perception of interactions. To fill this gap, Mackey (2002) studied L2 learners' role in relation to interactional processes. To collect the data, she videotaped the process of the participants' interaction in dyads and asked the L2 learners to talk about their thoughts when interactional feedback was provided. Her findings indicate that when learners interact with native speakers in dyads, their responses and comments increase greatly. In addition, she also points out that learners' responses and comments support the results of previous studies on comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985) that helps SLLs construct meanings in the process of negotiated communication. Mackey's (2002) study serves as a good example of exploring Long's interaction hypothesis from the learners' perspective.

Output Hypothesis and Second Language Proficiency

Following Long's (1983) Interaction Hypothesis, Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis claims that L2 learners' speech production accelerates L2 learners' language proficiency; that is, the production enables L2 learners to move from the level of

knowing words semantically to knowing them syntactically. For instance, when L2 learners encounter communicative difficulties in a conversation, they are forced to find appropriate or precise words to convey their messages. During the process of word selection, L2 learners' ability to simply finding words to construct into producing sentences is enhanced.

De Bot's (1996) study echoes Swain's (1985) argument on the basis of the language production model proposed by Levelt (1989), that consists of several major components, including *conceptualization*, *formulation*, and *articulation* (i.e., execution). *Conceptualization* refers to the state in which the speaker must decide on the message to be conveyed, also known as the *preverbal message* or the message level of representation. *Formulation* refers to the state in which the speaker must convert his/her message into a linguistic form, and it involves *lexicalization* (selecting the appropriate word) and *syntactic planning* (putting the words in the right order and adding grammatical elements). The last major component, *articulation*, refers to the state in which the speaker must accompany the motor movements needed to convey the message. These components are processed through a cycle, depending on how successfully L2 learners comprehend received messages.

Providing negative feedback for L2 learners is considered a positive approach for language development mainly because negative feedback prompts learners to notice their uses of L2 forms (Mackey, 2002). Lin and Hedgcock (1996) investigate how four low-proficient Chinese immigrants to Spain and four high-proficient Chinese university students of Spanish incorporated negative feedback when learning Spanish. They found out that the subjects with low proficiency revealed they were not aware of errors and

rarely incorporated native speakers' corrections in their speech, whereas the subjects with high proficiency were aware of the corrections. Lin and Hedgcock (1996) suggest that L2 learners' proficiency influences their incorporation of feedback and error corrections.

Given the previous studies that stated that interaction with NEs facilitates NNEs' levels of speaking proficiency, language as well as content instructors can implement various teaching techniques that help L2 speakers' language skills in an academic setting, such as *Cooperative Learning* (Dörnyei, 1997; Johnson & Johnson, 1994), collaborative learning (Nyikos & Hashimoto, 1997), and interaction with native speakers (Seliger, 1983). When SLLs are familiar with the content, they are more likely to be "emotionally invested" (Whyte, 1994, p. 293). The reason that they are involved lies in the fact that when SLLs have the extensive knowledge on one particular discourse domain, the affective factor is minimized; therefore, they feel more confident in engaging in the practice and are able to produce sentences that are more complex, coherent, and independent.

Cooperative learning is a group learning activity organized so that learning is dependent on the socially-structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others (Olsen & Kagan, 1992, p.8). Slavin (1991) and Kessler (1992) have pointed out that cooperative learning can benefit L2 learners in and outside of the L2 field. Oxford (1997) lists several advantages of implementing cooperative learning in the language and content area curriculum, including promoting intrinsic motivation and task achievement, improving attitudes toward the subject, and increasing the chances of developing academic peer norms.

When L2 learners do not consider themselves as members of the target culture, they might be unwilling to contribute their efforts to that society. Jacoby and Ochs (1995) argue co-construction is an important concept in sociolinguistics. As Jacoby and Ochs define it, “co-construction is the joint creation of a form, interpretation, stance, action, activity, identity, institution, skill, ideology, emotion, or other culturally meaningful reality” (p. 171). In addition, co-construction of participating in the conversation is an essential concept in the theory of Interactional Competence proposed by Hall (1995). The researcher suggests that individuals acquire interactional competence by participating in daily practice so that they will be able to manage and negotiate meaning with other people. On the contrary, if L2 learners lack interactional competence, they might feel that they are excluded from their respective discourse community, which becomes a barrier to become a full participant of the community.

Based on the previous reviewed studies, the findings suggest that interaction with NESs plays an essential role in language proficiency. However, several potential variables may prevent L2 speakers from interacting with NESs which lead to their willingness to participate in academic activities. Previous research has suggested that there is a cause-effect relationship of affective factors on language proficiency, such as attitude (Lee, 2005), personality (Galvan & Fukada, 1997/98), anxiety and motivation (Ehrman, Leaver, & Oxford, 2003), most of which have shown negative willingness to communicate in a given environment.

Although American universities are more diverse now than at any time in previous years (Keller, 2001), it seems that the majority of American institutions fail to integrate educational curriculum to help international students cope with educational,

social, and cultural challenges. These challenges seem to be the same as two decades ago. In order to place international students in their belonging discourse communities, researchers feel it is imperative to learn how to live and work effectively with students from different cultures (Smith & Schonfeld, 2000).

Chapter Summary

This chapter of the study presented a review of relevant literature and included sections on discourse communities, second language speakers' willingness to participate in academic settings, potential factors that may influence international students' willingness to communicate and participate in class, and the relationship between international students' levels of oral proficiency and interaction with native speakers. Chapter 3 will present the methods and procedures that were followed in this research.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

This study followed a quantitative research design which will be presented in this section of the manuscript. Specifically, the rationale for the selection of the research methodology will be described, followed by the research questions investigated. Next, the contexts and survey participants of the study will be detailed, followed by the data analysis procedures used in this research.

Rationale for the Selection of the Research Methodology

The researcher conducted the study following a descriptive quantitative approach. Borland (2001) states that quantitative research is to “describe, predict, and control” (p. 8). Given his desire to investigate international students’ perceived difficulties in speaking in English for Academic Purpose (EAP) settings, particularly East Asian graduate students, and potential factors that influence their speaking performance in academic settings, the researcher employed a survey research approach. Several reasons guided the selection of a quantitative design as the primary framework, including its philosophy and its applicability. In general, quantitative research attempts to discover existing facts (Scott & Morrison, 2006) and to explain phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analyzed using mathematically-based methods (Creswell, 1994). This viewpoint is also shared by Hara (1995) who implied that in quantitative research, in order to find out exact facts, researchers must use neutral scientific language through digits, which are universally acceptable and an unchanged function in all research environments (Hara, 1995). In addition, Cohen (1980) argues that quantitative research

employs empirical methods and empirical statements. According to Cohen, an empirical statement is defined as a descriptive statement about what is the case in the real world rather than what ought to be the case.

With regard to the applicability in quantitative research design, the principal investigator aimed to explore factors that may potentially influence international students' speaking performance. One of the strengths in a quantitative design is that the researcher is able to quantify opinions, attitudes and behaviors (Gall, 1996) and, in the case of the present study, attempt to understand how international students feel about certain issues as a whole.

Another strength of employing a quantitative approach is that the researcher is able to test the hypothesis or findings in the literature (Tunmer, Chapman, Greaney, & Prochnow, 2002). When the literature was reviewed for this research study, regarding factors influencing international students' speaking performance, it was noticed that whereby Liu (2001) identified a list of socio-cultural and affective factors that may prevent international students from participating in classroom discussion, he did not rank order these factors, specifying which were the ones that prevented the students from fully participating in classroom discussions.

Of the quantitative methods, the most appropriate for this study is the use of a survey. As Visser, Krosnick, and Lavraks (2000) point out a "survey is a specific type of field study that involves the collection of data from a sample of elements drawn from a well-defined population through the use of questionnaire" (p.223) and the systematic gathering of information from respondents for the purpose of understanding and/or predicting some aspects of the hypothesis. In addition, survey research offers the

possibility of making refined descriptive assertions about a student body, a city, a nation or other large population (Rubin & Babbie, 2005).

Surveys also serve the function of finding existing phenomena in various cultures (Rea & Parker, 2005). Thus, the survey is seen as a reflection of respondents' attitudes, preferences, and opinions through verbal information from people about themselves (Dornyei, 2003; Rea & Parker, 2005) or characteristics of the focused population (Creswell, 2005).

In this study, although researchers such as Ferris and Tagg (1996) identified international students' perceived difficulties in speaking and listening as being an artifact of their lack of language abilities, and their cultural backgrounds, their research did not specifically explore why international students feel uncomfortable participating in classroom discussions and in other oral participatory activities. This led to the principal investigator's research interest in international students' difficulties in speaking and listening and their willingness to become full participants in the academic discourse communities.

Another rationale for adopting survey research is that it enables researchers to analyze multiple variables at the same time. Taking this study as an example, in addition to identifying international students' perceived difficulties, the factors found in Liu's (2001) study were analyzed in order to test whether these factors may potentially influence international students' oral participation in academic settings.

In this study, a questionnaire was designed to collect data. Due to the essence of a quantitative approach, which is to find a generalized answer from scientific research, the questionnaire has become one of the most employed data collection devices in statistical

work (Dörnyei, 2003). According to Brown (2001), questionnaires are considered a useful tool in collecting data from a target population, such as the subjects in the present study. It was the aim of the principal investigator to elicit TGS' factual, behavioral, and attitudinal information through various questions (Dörnyei, 2003) on the instrument. Of all the desired data in relation to attitudinal information, the investigator was particularly interested in respondents' opinions, beliefs, and interests.

In addition, questionnaires are employed as a means of collecting data because of their efficiency in terms of researchers' "time, effort, and financial concerns" (Rea & Parker, 2005, p. 5). If questionnaires are well-designed and structured, researchers may be able to collect data in a timely manner, which is essential to those who are conducting research in addition to balancing a full-time job and those addressing family concerns (Gillham, 2000). Moreover, questionnaires can be conducted in various ways including using email or web-based software to protect potential respondents' privacy (Hakim, 2000). This characteristic is important to researchers because potential respondents are able to complete the survey and return it in a secure computer setting.

Another concern in collecting questionnaire data is whether the collected data are interpreted in a biased manner. Because questionnaires are filled out anonymously, they are not subject to a researcher's bias toward potential respondents which could be caused by familiarity with the subjects or by their voice or facial expressions (Rea & Park, 2005). Therefore, in this study, questionnaires were implemented as the primary method for collecting data.

Research Questions

The following research questions were investigated in this study.

1. How comfortable do Taiwanese graduate students feel in academic situations in this study?
2. Of all international students' perceived speaking difficulties, which ones are the most difficult as perceived by Taiwanese graduate students?
3. Which factors have a major impact on Taiwanese graduate students' speaking performance in academic settings?

Contexts and Survey Participants

The research site for this study was The University of Tennessee (the University), a large research-one public in the southeastern United States of America. Based on a report released in 2007 (Institution for International Education, 2007), Asia remains the largest source of international students, accounting for 58% (¶ 2) of all internationals in U.S. universities. Similarly, according to the survey released in 2006 by The University of Tennessee's Center for International Education, 1,087 international students were enrolled at The University of Tennessee, and approximately 500 students were from East Asia, including China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. For this study, the researcher focused on graduate students from Taiwan for a variety of reasons.

For this study, the researcher recruited both male and female graduate students from TSA. Currently, there are 49 Taiwanese students at The University of Tennessee, and 40 of them are enrolled in graduate programs. In the study, all 40 graduate students agreed to participate in this study. The participants' demographic information is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of Survey Participants' Demographic Information

	N=40	%
Gender		
Male	22	55
Female	18	45
Academic Disciplines		
Arts & Sciences (AS)	8	20
Engineering (ENG)	15	37.5
Business Administration (BUSA)	8	20
Education, Health, and Human Sciences (EHHS)	5	12.5
Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (ASNR)	4	10
Length of Stay		
<1 year	2	5
1-2 year	15	37.5
3-4 years	17	42.5
5-6 years	5	12.5
>6 years	1	2.5

In this study, undergraduate students were not included due to the academic styles of the classes that they typically attend. In undergraduate courses, most students attend large lecture classes, whereas in graduate programs the class size is relatively small. Therefore, it is assumed that international students in undergraduate programs may not engage in the same type of active class discussion as graduate students do (Benesch, 2001), and may not perceive having the same speaking difficulties with their expressive English language skills as international graduate students.

Instrumentation

To collect data for this research study, the researcher constructed a questionnaire (see Appendix A) based on an examination of previous studies focusing on international students' perceived speaking difficulties in academic settings and factors that influence their participation. The content of the questionnaire corresponds to the research questions in this study as shown in Table 2. Part I of the questionnaire asked participants for basic demographic information, such as major, length of study at The University of Tennessee, and English skills emphasized before enrolling at The University of Tennessee (see Table 3).

Part II addressed the first research question, *How comfortable do Taiwanese graduate students feel in academic situations in this study?* In Part II, participants were asked about their degree of comfort in participating in 12 academic situations. A 5-point scale (1=Very Uncomfortable, 2=Somewhat Uncomfortable, 3=Neutral, 4=Somewhat Comfortable, 5=Very Comfortable) was used for participants to answer the questions.

Table 2

The Corresponding Content to the Research Questions

Research Questions	Content of the Questionnaire
1. How comfortable do Taiwanese graduate students feel in academic situations in this study?	Part II
2. Of all international students' perceived speaking difficulties, which ones are the most difficult as perceived by Taiwanese graduate students?	Part III
3. Which factors have a major impact on international students' speaking performance in academic settings?	Part IV

Part III addressed the second research question, *Of all international students' perceived speaking difficulties, which ones are the most difficult as perceived by Taiwanese graduate students?* Part III used the same list of activities as in Part II and asked participants to rank their top 4 choices of their perceived difficulties in academic situations. Parts II and III included a list of questions adapted from the survey constructed in 1996 by Ferris (see Appendix B) for the permission letter from these researchers. Several reasons have supported the researcher in adapting Ferris' (1996) survey. One reason is that their survey served as a pioneer survey and played an important role in exploring international students' perceived oral and aural difficulties. However, their survey focused on ESL and immigrant university students on the undergraduate and graduate levels whereas the researcher in the present study focused only on international graduate student from Taiwan.

Table 3

Language Skills Emphasized before Enrolling at The University of Tennessee

Language Skill Emphasized	N=40	%
Reading	22	55
Writing	14	35
Reading & Writing	4	10

Part IV addressed the third research question “Which factors have a major impact on international students’ speaking performance in academic settings?” The questions in Part IV were constructed based on Liu’s (2001) findings, and consist of 19 items on the instrument answerable by a 5-point scales ranging from *rarely* (1) to *always* (5). Liu (2001) reported that 110 factors are related to ESL students’ academic participation. Of all the factors, he classified them into three categories, based on the impact of a particular factor. They are: positive factors, negative factors, and neutral factors. In the present study, the researcher constructed his survey questions based only on negative and neutral factors because he was investigating the TGS’ perceptions of their speaking and listening difficulties in academic settings which would negatively impact their willingness to orally participate in class activities. The questions are divided into five categories, including pedagogical, socio-cultural, cognitive, linguistic, and affective aspects. However, on the survey, these questions will not be labeled as such because respondents might provide insight based on the title categories, which may in turn, influence how they answer these questions (Rubin & Babbie, 2005). Therefore, the five categories on the survey were generalized as students’ perceived difficulties that may affect their oral class participation.

The last part of the survey consists of one open-ended question. This question served a complementary role to the close-ended questions on the survey for this research (Oppenheim, 1992).

Data Collection Procedures

Data Collection

In conducting a study related to human subjects, researchers need to promise potential participants' privacy and confidentiality (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). To protect the subjects' identities in this study, an Institutional Review Board (IRB) Form A (see Appendix C) was submitted to the IRB at The University of Tennessee prior to the process of collecting data. Upon receiving permission to conduct the research, a pilot study was conducted.

Pilot Study

Since it is impossible even for senior researchers to have a perfect questionnaire in the first round, prior to collecting data with the survey instrument, a pilot study was conducted. Researchers such as Dörnyei (2003) and Sudman and Bradburn (1982) consider a pilot study an important step in instrument design. Therefore, the researcher pilot tested the questionnaire with five graduate students from Mainland China in order to provide feedback to the researcher for any adaptations that needed to be made to the instrument.

When the researcher received the permission to conduct his pilot study in late November 2008, he asked the chairperson of the Chinese Student/Scholar Association to identify five volunteers to participate in a pilot study. For their participation, they would each receive a \$5 coffee coupon. Ultimately, two female graduate and three male graduate students were recruited for the pilot study. Their majors were: Electrical

Engineering, Education Psychology, and Computer Science. To fill out the survey, the volunteers met at the International House on The University of Tennessee campus. Before they started the survey, the principal investigator asked them to give him their comments and made notes on the questions they have found confusing. Their responses informed the present survey. For example, in Part I, when they answered the question, *Which English academic language skill was more emphasized before enrolling at The University of Tennessee?*, instead of checking one answer, 3 out of 5 subjects checked two answers, which indicated the confusion they experienced while completing the instrument. They also gave comments concerning the open-ended questions and identified several spelling errors on the survey, which were then addressed by the researcher.

Language Choice on the Survey

The survey was written in English based on the following assumptions. First, it was assumed by the researcher that the TGS were capable of reading and understanding the survey questions in English. Since they passed the TOEFL to satisfy entrance into Graduate School, they demonstrated that they had a high proficiency in written English. In addition, as graduate students, they were required to participate in all academic activities in English at the university. Therefore, the principal investigator assumed that they would feel most comfortable in answering the survey questions in English.

The second assumption was that using English on the survey might avoid confusion, on the part of the native Chinese speaker subjects, in interpreting the meaning of English words. There are not always one-to-one corresponding words when translating English into Chinese and vice-versa. This is why the principal investigator constructed

the survey instrument in English and did not translate the survey into Chinese. Converse and Presser (1993) corroborate this rationale in their research when they suggest that researchers utilize their own personal experiences to clarify potential confusion in their own research studies. In this study, this is which this researcher did.

Survey Administration

The rationale for adopting the postal service for delivering of the survey to the subjects rather than using an online survey is that potential participants may repeatedly click on the survey link, which may change the validity and reliability of the study. In November 2008, upon receiving the IRB Form A approval from The University of Tennessee, an email was composed by the researcher “Please help me graduate” (see Appendix D) and sent to all TGS located in the most updated Taiwanese address book of the TSA. In the message, all the TGS were asked to participate in the study and were informed that a postal mail with a consent form and a survey would be sent to their address. They were asked to mail the survey back to the principal investigator in a self-addressed stamped envelope.

However, the surveys were sent during the winter break and most Taiwanese students were either out of town or visiting their parents or friends in Taiwan. For the first round, a total of 15 surveys were received in 1 week. A second email letter was sent out to urge them to participate in this study and stated that their responses would play a significant role in the study. During the second round, another 24 surveys were received. During that period of time, a student wrote an email suggesting that he would not come to the States until the day before classes resumed at The University of Tennessee. His survey was subsequently returned during the second week in January of 2009.

The return rate for the survey was 100% with all 40 graduate students in the Taiwanese Student Association, returning their completed surveys. In order to protect the subjects' identities and ensure their confidentiality, upon receipt of each returned survey, the researcher separated the survey and the consent form from the envelope. The researcher placed all the surveys in one folder with the consent forms placed in another one. Upon the completion of the study, all data will be shredded.

Data Analysis

When receiving participants' returned surveys, the researcher categorized their majors into five academic disciplines. They were: Art & Sciences (AS), Engineering (ENG), Business Administration (BUSA), Education, Health, and Human Sciences (EHHS), and Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (ASNR). The academic disciplines were clustered based on college structures published at The University of Tennessee.

Next in order to analyze the data, a statistical software package SPSS 17.0 was used, downloadable for all faculty and students at the University's Website. A descriptive analysis was utilized to display characteristics of overall frequencies in the study, including means and percentages. Results on the Part II, Part III, and Part IV of the survey were designed to answer the following three research questions, respectively.

- How comfortable do Taiwanese graduate students feel in academic situations in this study?
- Of all international students' perceived speaking difficulties, which ones are the most difficult as perceived by Taiwanese graduate students

- Which factors have a major impact on international students' speaking participation in academic settings?

In addition to the statistical results stated above, the principal investigator was also interested in identifying different findings related to the statistical results. For example, in the research questions, comparisons among various academic disciplines in relation to the first research question were not included. When the statistical results were examined in detail, however, several salient findings were identified.

At the last stage of the data analysis, the participants' comments were analyzed and then coded. The participants' comments and concerns regarding this research topic were first transcribed by the principal investigator and then coded. The coding process for the present study was based on the same coding procedures suggested by Liu (2000). Liu first categorized his data into five categories which were: pedagogical, affective, social-cultural, cognitive and sociolinguistic. Then, he further classified the reported factors in each of the five categories of his research into three sub-categories: *positive*, *neutral*, and *negative*. This researcher followed the same procedures for coding his data and is illustrated in Figure 1. The reported comments and factors will be discussed in Chapter 4.

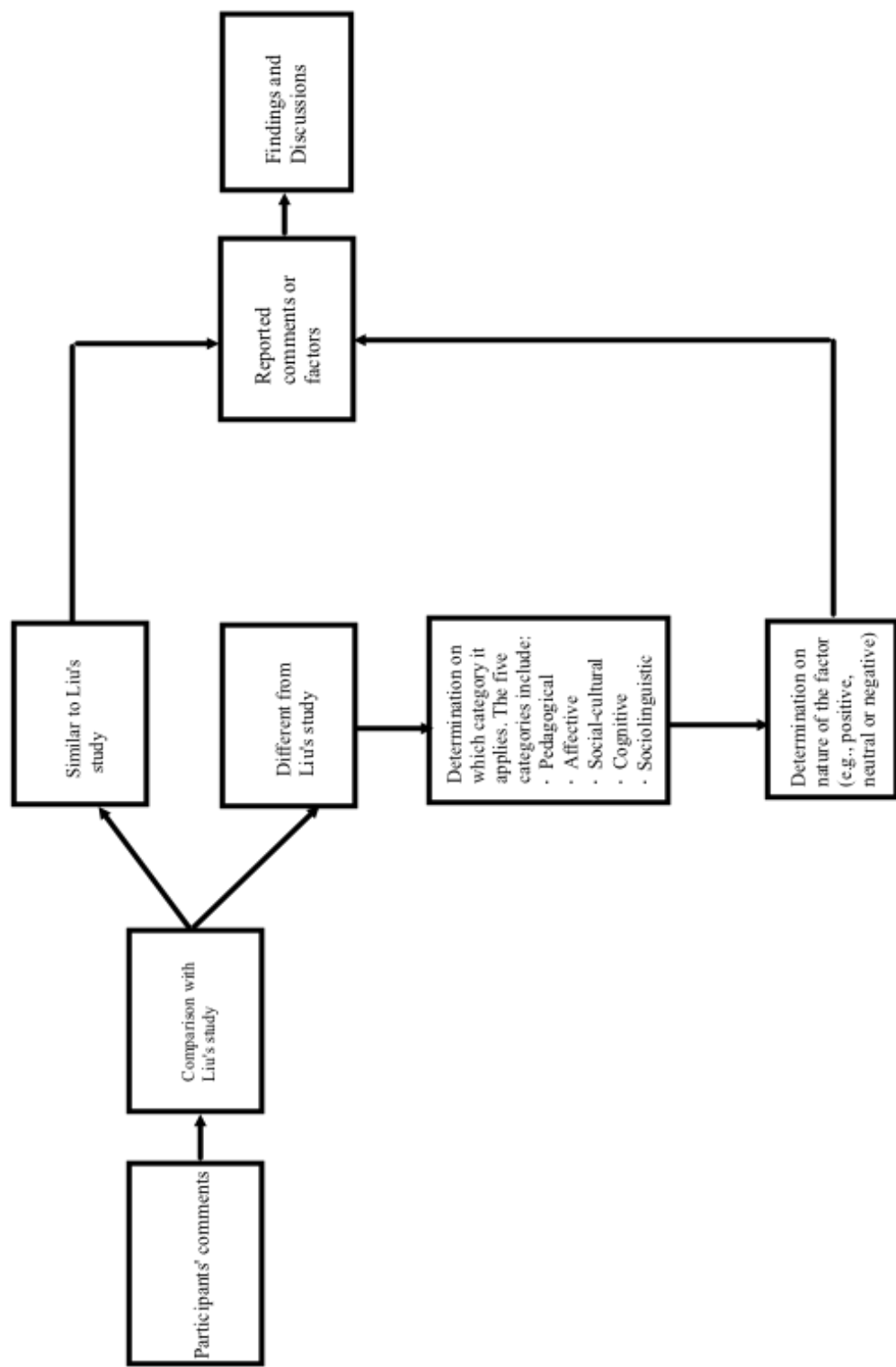


Figure 1
Participants' Comments on Potential Factors

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the rationale for the research design and used a quantitative approach to address the research questions. A pilot study was conducted prior to the survey administration in this study. The return rate was 100%. Data were categorized and analyzed upon the receipt of the returned surveys.

Chapter 4 will present a discussion of the analysis and the finding in the study.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the data collected in this research study and a discussion of the findings. The purpose of the present study was to explore Taiwanese international graduate students' perceived speaking difficulties in academic settings at The University of Tennessee. Specifically, the principal investigator attempted to find the answers to the following research questions:

1. How comfortable do Taiwanese graduate students feel in academic situations in this study?
2. Of all the international students' perceived speaking difficulties, which ones are the most difficult as perceived by Taiwanese graduate students?
3. Which factors have a major impact on Taiwanese graduate students' speaking participation in academic settings?

Research Question Number One

In the beginning of the section, the researcher presents findings in relation to the first research question, *How comfortable do Taiwanese graduate students feel in academic situations in this study?* To report the findings of the analysis of these data from the survey, the researcher will report the overall of mean and percentage of responses by the Taiwanese graduate student subjects (N=40) on the survey instrument used in this research study at The University of Tennessee. The data were analyzed by the

researcher using descriptive statistics, which for this study included calculation of the means and percentages of the responses on the survey instrument.

Part One of the Survey

The first part of the survey asked the participants' information regarding their majors, length of residency and languages skills emphasized before they were enrolled at The University of Tennessee. These demographic results were summarized in Table 1 (see Chapter 3).

Part Two of the Survey

The second part of the survey asked the Taiwanese graduate students (TGS) to respond to the questions regarding their levels of comfort when speaking in a variety of academic situations (See Appendix A for the complete copy of the instrument.) Table 4 summarizes the TGS' responses on the second part of the survey questions.

The TGS's comfort levels were calculated and ranked based on the mean scores of their responses. These levels are: *Very Uncomfortable* (1), *Somewhat Uncomfortable* (2), *Neutral* (3), *Somewhat Comfortable* (4), and *Very Comfortable* (5).

Table 4

Participants' Comfort in Various Academic Situations (N=40)

Academic situations	Uncomfortable		Neutral	Comfortable		Mean
	Very N (%)	Somewhat N (%)	No. (%)	Somewhat N (%)	Very N (%)	
Asking fellow students questions during class	20 (50)	14 (35)	2 (5)	1 (2.5)	3 (7.5)	1.82
Leading class Discussions	15 (37.5)	19 (47.5)	4 (10)	1 (2.5)	1 (2.5)	1.85
Participating in large group discussions	14 (35)	16 (40)	3 (7.5)	5 (12.5)	2 (5)	2.12
Giving presentations in front of the class	14 (35)	15 (37.5)	4 (10)	4 (10)	3 (7.5)	2.18
Answering questions in Class	12 (30)	16 (40)	6 (15)	4 (10)	2 (5)	2.20
Asking instructors questions during class	6 (15)	24 (60)	3 (7.5)	6 (15)	1 (2.5)	2.30
Asking instructors questions before class	6 (15)	16 (40)	8 (20)	7 (17.5)	3 (7.5)	2.62
Asking fellow students questions before class	4 (10)	10 (25)	16 (40)	8 (20)	2 (5)	2.85
Asking fellow students questions After class	2 (5)	10 (25)	15 (37.5)	7 (17.5)	6 (15.0)	3.12
Asking instructors questions after class	1 (2.5)	11 (27.5)	9 (22.5)	14 (35)	5 (12.5)	3.28
Talking with the instructor in his/her office	2 (5)	1 (2.5)	8 (20)	19 (47.5)	10 (25)	3.85
Interacting with fellow students on out-of-class projects and assignments	2 (5)	2 (5)	3 (7.5)	21 (52.5)	12 (30)	3.98

Note: Lowest mean = *Most uncomfortable*

Responses on the Survey to the First Research Question

To generalize the findings in relation to the first research question, the respondents *did not feel comfortable* when speaking to and answering questions from instructors and fellow graduate students during class. In fact, most TGS indicated that they felt *more comfortable* speaking to their instructors and fellow graduate students outside of the class. Based on the results, in ascending order, most participants reported that they *did not feel comfortable* asking fellow students questions during class (M=1.82), followed by *not feeling comfortable* leading class discussions (M=1.85), *not feeling comfortable* participating in group discussions (M=2.12), or *not feeling comfortable* giving presentations in front of the class (M=2.18), or answering questions in class (M=2.20). They *did not feel comfortable* either asking instructors questions during class (M=2.30), asking instructors questions before class (M=2.62), or asking fellow students questions before class (M=2.85).

Table 4 shows the TGS' level of comfort in speaking in various academic situations. The results indicated that more than 85% (34 out of 40) of the respondents expressed that they felt very uncomfortable or uncomfortable doing this. Specifically, 50% (20) felt *very uncomfortable* and 35% (N=14) felt *somewhat uncomfortable* asking fellow students questions during class, with the overall mean being 1.82. Of all the respondents, only 4 (10%) TGS responded that they felt *comfortable* or *very comfortable* doing so in English in an academic setting. In addition, with an overall mean of 1.85, most respondents also indicated that they *did not feel comfortable* in leading class discussions. In fact, 34 out of 40 (85%) TGS suggested that they felt being *very or*

somewhat uncomfortable in doing so. Only 2 TGS said that they felt *comfortable* in leading class discussions.

With regard to the respondents' level comfort in relation to participating in large group discussions, 75% (30 out of 40) of the TGS expressed that they *did not feel comfortable* in participating in large group discussions (M=2.12). Only 7 TGS indicated that they *felt comfortable* in speaking in large groups. Table 4 also shows the TGS' level of comfort in giving presentations in front of the class (M=2.18). Essentially, 72.5% (N=29) of the respondents reported that they *did not feel comfortable* in giving presentations in front of the class; 35% (N=14) felt *very uncomfortable* and 37.5% (N=15) felt *somewhat uncomfortable*, respectively. Seven out of 40 (17.5%) of the respondents reported that they felt *comfortable* in giving presentations in front of the class.

The participants' also reported that they were not at ease in answering questions in class. Indeed, more than half (N=28) of the participants (70%) considered feeling *very uncomfortable* (30% or N=12) or *uncomfortable* (40% or N=16) in answering questions in class. Fifteen percent of the TGS indicated that they felt *somewhat comfortable* (10% or N=4) or *very comfortable* (5% or N=2) in answering questions in class. It was also noted that the number of participants who answered feeling *comfortable* answering questions in class was identical to the number of those who answered feeling *neutral* about doing this. When asked to what extent the students felt *comfortable* in asking instructors questions during class, overall, 75% (N=30) of the participants reported that they *did not feel comfortable* in asking instructors questions during class. Fifteen percent of the TGS said that they felt *comfortable* in doing so, and merely 1 (2.5%) student

expressed that he/she felt *very comfortable* in asking instructors questions during class. When comparing participants' comfort in asking instructors questions with asking fellow students questions during class, the participants' answers suggested they felt *uncomfortable* doing so in both academic situations, 75% (N=30) and 85% (N=34) respectively.

Regarding the first item on the survey, "Do you feel comfortable asking instructors questions before class," the subjects' answers were respectively *very uncomfortable* (15% or N=6), *uncomfortable* (40% or N=16), *comfortable* (17.5%; N=7), and *very comfortable* (7.5%; N=3). In addition, 20% of the participants (N=8) answered *neutral* to this question. When comparing the items on the second part of the survey, regarding asking questions of the instructors and fellow students before class, it was noticed that 55% (N=22) said that *did not feel more comfortable* in asking questions of the instructors whereas 35% of the TGS (N=14) suggested that they *did not feel comfortable* asking fellow students questions before class.

The participants reported that when asking fellow students questions before class (M=2.85) they were neither comfortable nor uncomfortable. Ten percent (N=4) of the TGS reported that they felt *very uncomfortable* in asking fellow students question before class and 25% (N=10) said that they felt *uncomfortable* in doing so. Ten participants (25%) indicated that they felt *very comfortable* or *comfortable*, 5% (N=2) and 20% (N=8) respectively, when asking questions of fellow students questions. Also, 16 participants (40 %) felt neither *comfortable* nor *uncomfortable*, and reported feeling *neutral* when answering this survey question in Part II.

When compared with the participants' level of discomfort in participating in a variety of academic situations, the subjects felt *more comfortable* in other social settings, specifically outside of the classroom. For example, the respondents reported that they felt *more comfortable* in interacting with fellow students on out-of-class projects and assignments (M=3.98), followed by talking with instructors in their offices (M=3.85), when asking instructors questions after class (M=3.28), and when asking questions of fellow students after class (M=3.12).

With regard to the participants' comfort levels when interacting with fellow students on out-of-class projects and assignments, about 30% (N=12) of the TGS agreed that they could perform this particular academic activity *very comfortably*. Another 52.5% (N=21) of the respondents said that they felt *comfortable* in doing so. Only 10% (N=4) of the TGS indicated that they felt *very uncomfortable* and 2 participants (5%) felt *uncomfortable* in performing this activity.

Similar to the finding above, almost a quarter (25%) of the TGS (N=10) indicated that they felt very comfortable when talking with the instructor in his/her office. Almost half (19 out of 40) of the participants agreed that they could *comfortably* speak to their instructors in their offices. Merely 5% (2 out of 40) respondents said they felt *very uncomfortable* performing this academically-related activity and 2.5% (1 out of 40) reported feeling *uncomfortable* when they performed this aforementioned academic activity. In addition, as seen in Table 4 with an overall mean of 3.28 and 3.12, respectively, when asking questions of fellow students and instructors, the respondents suggested that they felt *more comfortable* in speaking English when academic activities took place after class.

Table 5 reported the participants' comfort in academic situations controlled by academic disciplines. Of all of the students from 5 major colleges who took part in this research study, students from the College of Engineering indicated that they *did not feel comfortable* in various academic situations, including giving presentations in front of the class (M=1.57), leading class discussions (M=1.57), and asking fellow students questions before class (M=1.29). However, their responses also suggested that students from the College of Engineering felt *very comfortable* in interacting with fellow students on out-of-class projects and assignments (M=4.12). Table 5 also shows that students (N=4) from the College of Agricultural Science and Natural Resources seemed to feel more comfortable than the students in the College of Engineering. In addition, it is worth noting that students from the College of Education, Health and Human Sciences (N=5) have highest mean score of all when *feeling comfortable* when talking with their instructors in their campus offices.

Table 5

Participants' Comfort in Academic Situations by Academic Disciplines

Academic Discipline	AS Mean N=8	ENG Mean N=15	BUSA Mean N=8	EHHS Mean N=5	ASNR Mean N=4
Asking instructors questions before class	2.38	2.36	3.00	3.00	2.80
Asking instructors questions during class	2.38	2.14	1.75	1.60	3.20
Asking instructors questions after class	3.25	3.00	3.12	3.60	4.00
Talking with the instructor in his/her office	4.12	3.64	3.62	4.40	3.80
Asking fellow students questions before class	3.25	2.50	2.75	3.00	3.20
Asking fellow students questions during class	2.38	1.29	1.38	1.80	3.20
Asking fellow students questions After class	3.38	2.57	1.38	3.00	4.00
Interacting with fellow students on out-of-class projects and assignments	4.12	4.36	3.75	3.60	3.40
Answering questions in class	2.00	2.00	2.18	3.27	3.40
Giving presentations in front of the class	2.00	1.57	1.75	3.20	3.80
Participating in large group discussions	2.12	1.79	1.75	2.20	3.60
Leading class discussions	1.62	1.57	1.75	1.60	3.40

AS: Art & Sciences

ENG: Engineering

BUSA: Business Administration

EHHS: Education, Health, and Human Sciences

ASNR: Agricultural Sciences & Natural Resources

Results from the Second Research Question

This section presents research findings in relation to the second research question, *Of all international students' perceived speaking difficulties, which ones were the most difficult as perceived by Taiwanese graduate students?* Table 6 summarizes the TGS' responses on the Part III of the research survey. Reported results on this table were calculated in the following way. First the researcher identified the participants' responses and ranked them according to reported perceived levels of difficulty when speaking. Then, each ranked item was given a weighed point for calculation. That is, the *highest (1)* ranking was assigned 4 points, the *second highest* ranking was assigned 3 points, the *third highest ranking* was given 2 points, and the *least highest ranking* was assigned 1 point. After the points were assigned for each rank level, which were placed in rows and columns in a table, the researcher added the points for each row. Then, the last step was to list the items with responses in rank order of perceived difficulty, with the highest ranked items (i.e., those with the most perceived level of difficulty) on top of the table and the lowest ranked items (i.e., those with the least perceived level of difficulty) on the bottom of the table.

Table 6

Participants' Rank on Perceived Difficulties in Academic Settings (N=40)

Difficulty in academic setting	Frequency				Point
	Greatest	2	3	Least	
Leading class discussions	13	8	0	1	77
Participating in large group discussions	6	9	6	3	66
Answering questions in class	3	9	8	3	58
Giving presentations in front of the class	9	1	5	0	49
Asking instructors questions during class	5	2	4	7	41
Talking with the instructor in his/her office	0	3	8	10	35
Interacting with fellow students on out-of-class projects and assignments	2	4	3	2	28
Asking fellow students questions before class	2	0	3	7	21
Asking fellow students questions after class	0	3	1	1	12
Asking fellow students questions during class	0	1	1	3	8
Asking instructors questions before class	0	0	1	3	5
Asking instructors questions after class	0	0	0	0	0

The participants were asked to rank their perceived level of speaking difficulties on Part III of the survey. These items consisted of several major aspects of academic activities, including leading class discussions, participating in large group discussions, giving presentations, asking the instructor before/during/after class, asking fellow students questions before/during/after class, talking with the instructor, and interacting with fellow students. By following the same procedure as indicated above (i.e., rank ordering the answers), and then subsequently examining the total points calculated in Table 6. It can be seen that *leading class discussion* was reported as being the *greatest difficulty* perceived by the participants (with a total number of points of 77), followed by *participation in large group discussions*, *answering questions in class*, and *giving presentations in front of the class*. It can be also seen that 13 out of 40 (32.5%) participants ranked this academic activity as their primary concern.

Results of the Third Research Question

Part IV on the survey answered the third research question, *which factors have a major impact on Taiwanese graduate students' speaking performance in academic settings?* Table 7 summarizes the participants' responses on the items in Part IV. In order to better examine the descriptive statistics reported on Table 7, some categories were combined in Table 8.

Table 7

Reported Factors that may Affect Participants' Willingness in Oral Participating (N=40)

Factors	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always
	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)
1. Level of understanding of content and background knowledge	2 (5)	3 (7.5)	9 (22.5)	16 (40)	10 (25)
2. Ethnicity	7 (17.5)	7 (17.5)	12 (30)	11 (27.5)	3 (7.5)
3. Peer pressure	11 (27.5)	15 (37.5)	11 (27.5)	1 (2.5)	2 (5)
4. Instructors' teaching styles	2 (5)	13 (32.5)	15 (37.5)	8 (20)	2 (5)
5. Confidence in English pronunciation	2 (5)	7 (17.5)	7 (17.5)	13 (32.5)	11 (27.5)
6. Heavy course load	6 (15)	14 (35)	11 (27.5)	7 (17.5)	2 (5)
7. Do not have strong motivation to improve English skills	6 (15)	9 (22.5)	13 (32.5)	10 (25)	2 (5)
8. Will lose face when instructor or fellow students cannot understand me	3 (7.5)	4 (10)	11 (27.5)	14 (35)	8 (20)
9. Show respect for my instructor in class	9 (22.5)	21 (52.5)	6 (15)	3 (7.5)	1 (2.5)
10. Past experience in my home town affects my oral participation	3 (7.5)	9 (22.5)	16 (40)	9 (22.5)	3 (7.5)
11. Listening skills	2 (5)	4 (10)	7 (17.5)	21 (52.5)	6 (15)
12. General English ability (e.g., expressing thoughts, communicating with peers)	1 (2.5)	4 (10)	3 (7.5)	15 (37.5)	17 (42.5)

Table 7, continued.

Factors	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always
	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)
13. Level of accuracy in speaking English	1 (2.5)	6 (15)	17 (42.5)	14 (35)	2 (5)
14. Concerned about quality of speaking	2 (5)	9 (22.5)	14 (35)	10 (25)	5 (12.5)
15. Class size	10 (25)	11 (27.5)	12 (30)	5 (12.5)	2 (5)
16. My personality (e.g., shy and uncomfortable)	5 (12.5)	6 (15)	9 (22.5)	13 (32.5)	7 (17.1)
17. Feeling alienated in a class	3 (7.5)	5 (12.5)	21 (52.5)	10 (25)	1 (2.5)
18. Perception of a good learner (e.g., attentive listening, note-taking)	8 (20)	3 (7.5)	8 (20)	16 (40)	5 (12.5)
19. Seeking correct answers to an instructor's answers	3 (7.5)	11 (27.5)	12 (30)	11 (27.5)	3 (7.5)
20. Interest in content area course	7 (17.5)	15 (37.5)	12 (30)	4 (10)	2 (5)

The researcher regrouped the original five answerable scales (1-*Rarely*, 2-*Sometimes*, 3-*Often*, 4-*Very often*, and 5-*Always*) into the following three main categories *Rarely and Sometimes* (1), *Often* (2), and *Very often and Always* (3). Each category was calculated by adding the individual percentage of each answer as displayed on Table 8. The participants' answers with 50% or above in the two categories *Rarely and Sometimes* and *Very Often and Always* were discussed based on Table 9 and Table 10, respectively.

As shown in Table 8, 80% (N=32) of the participants reported that their general English ability (e.g., expressing thoughts, communicating with peers) *very often* or *always* affected their willingness to orally participate in academic activities, while only 12.5 subjects (N=5) answered *rarely* or *sometimes*. In addition, 67.5 % (N=27) of the participants also indicated that their listening skills were also a potential factor that affected their oral participation in class.

When asked whether their level of understanding of content and background knowledge would be a potential factor that affected their willingness of oral participation, 65% (N=26) of the participants were in agreement. With regards to the influence of pronunciation on their willingness of oral participation, 60% (N=24) of the subjects answered that their confidence in pronunciation *very often* or *always* affected their willingness to orally participate in class.

Table 8

Reported Factors that may Affect Participants' Willingness in Oral Participating

Items	Rarely & Sometimes %	Often %	Very Often & Always %
1. Level of understanding of content and background knowledge	12.5	22.5	65
2. Ethnicity	35	30	35
3. Peer pressure	65	27.5	7.5
4. Instructors' teaching styles	37.5	37.5	25
5. Confidence in English pronunciation	22.5	17.5	60
6. Heavy course load	50	27.5	22.5
7. Do not have strong motivation to improve English skills	37.5	32.5	30
8. Will lose face when instructor or fellow students cannot understand me	17.5	27.5	55
9. Show my respect for instructor in class	75	15	10
10. Past experience in my home town affects my oral participation	30	40	30
11. Listening skills	15	17.5	67.5
12. General English ability (e.g., expressing thoughts, communicating with peers)	12.5	7.5	80
13. Level of accuracy in speaking English	17.5	42.5	40
14. Concerned about quality of speaking	27.5	35	37.5
15. Class size	52.5	30	17.5

Table 8, continued.

Items	Rarely & Sometimes %	Often %	Very Often & Always %
16. My personality (e.g., shy and uncomfortable)	27.5	22.5	50
17. Feeling alienated in a class	20	52.5	27.5
18. Perception of a good learner (e.g., attentive listening, note-taking)	27.5	20	52.5
19. Seeking correct answers to an instructor's answers	35	30	35
20. Interest in content area course	55	30	15

It is worth noticing in Table 9 that three factors in relation to participants' personal perceptions or individual personalities appeared to impact their willingness to orally interact with their instructors or fellow students. In item 8, for example, 55% (N=22) of the participants reported that they were concerned about losing face in front of the class when their fellow students or instructors had difficulty understanding their spoken English. In addition, 52.5% (N=21) of the participants also said that their perception of being a good learner (i.e., taking notes, attentively listening rather than actively participating in class), played an important role in oral participation in various academic activities.

Table 9

Reported Factors with a Combination Of 50% Or Above on the Responses Of Very Often and Always

Factors	Rarely & Sometimes %	Often %	Very Often & Always %
General English ability (e.g., expressing thoughts, communicating with peers)	12.5	7.5	80
Listening skills	15	17.5	67.5
Level of understanding of content and background knowledge	12.5	22.5	65
Confidence in English pronunciation	22.5	17.5	60
Will lose face when instructor or Fellow students cannot understand me	17.5	27.5	55
Perception of a good learner (e.g., attentive listening, note-taking)	27.5	20	52.5
My personality (e.g., shy and uncomfortable)	27.5	22.5	50
Feeling alienated in a class	20	52.5	27.5

The participants in the survey also mentioned that their feeling concerning alienation from their fellow students also resulted in their unwillingness to participate in oral discussions. Twenty-one (52.5%) of the participants in the survey also mentioned that they often felt alienated in the classroom. Therefore, this feeling of alienation may have been a potential factor that prevented them from orally interacting with instructors or fellow students.

Table 10 highlights the participants' answers on Part IV and reports that factors such as their perception of showing respect for instructors, peer pressure, interest in content area courses, class size and their work load, played an insignificant role in shaping their willingness to actively orally participate in academic settings. In other

words 75% (N=30) of the participants reported that they rarely or sometimes considered the idea of showing respect for instructors in class to be a factor that hindered their oral participation.

By the same token, 65% (N=26) of the TGS said that *rarely* or *sometimes* felt that peer pressure was an obstacle to participating in oral communication activities in class. In addition, approximately 50% (N=20) of the TGS did not seem to regard having interest in content area courses (55% or N=22), class size (52.5% or N=21), and heavy course load (50% or N=20), as potential factors that influenced their oral participation.

Table 10

Reported Factors with a combination of 50% or above on the responses of Rarely and Sometimes

Factors	Rarely & Sometimes %	Often %	Very Often & Always %
Show my respect for instructor in class	75	15	10
Peer pressure	65	27.5	7.5
Interest in content area course	55	30	15
Class size	52.5	30	17.5
Heavy course load	50	27.5	22.5

Participants' Comments on Other Factors in Oral Class Participation

Table 11 shows the participants' comments on the last part of the survey, an open-ended section of the survey. Of all the participants in the study, only 5 out of 40 (12.5%) gave comments on what they perceived to be other factors concerning oral class participation that had not already been addressed in the survey.

After following the coding procedures suggested by Liu's (2002) research (see Figure 1, Chapter 3), it was determined by the principal investigator that there were no additional factors influencing the participants' willingness to orally participate in class that had not already been addressed in the survey. The participants' comments, however, appear in Table 11.

Table 11

Participants' Comments on other Potential Factors

Subject No.	Participants' Comments
S4	I like asking questions after class. I don't like talking during class.
S17	I speak in the class when I am asked to answer questions or to join in group discussions.
S19	My pronunciation is my greatest weakness.
S25	I talk when I like the teacher's teaching style.
S29	They speak too fast. I cannot catch their speed

Discussion of the Findings

To some extent, the findings in the research study reflect TGS' beliefs concerning and value placed on oral participation in various academic settings. The findings from the analysis of the data collected on the research survey suggest that for the TGS who participated in the study perceived that it is *uncomfortable* to speak to instructors or to their fellow students during class. The TGS' discomfort may result from several reasons. One of the possible reasons is that when TGS talk to their instructors or fellow students during class, they might pay more attention to their spoken English, which may in turn, result in their feeling uncomfortable interacting out loud in class.

During the interaction process, the TGS might constantly feel that they need to monitor their speech grammar, syntax and overall quality in front of the class. Presumably, the TGS who lack a good command of English are not willing to take the risk of speaking up during class, thus they avoid the pressure of generating incorrect or what they perceive to be lower quality English than their native English-speaking peers.

Another potential reason might be the participants' anxiety, preventing them from performing such tasks (Brown, 2008) such as speaking up during class, and particularly in the presence of their peers and instructors. They are concerned about not being able to answer well in front of the class.

However, when considering the participants' level of discomfort when speaking to their instructors before/during class, despite their cultural backgrounds, their discomfort may not largely derive from their deep-rooted Chinese culture, as argued by Liu (2000) and Liu and Kuo (1996). Instead, the motivating factor for these participants may be directly correlated to rigorous class requirements set by various disciplines and

instructors that require all students to orally participate in class discussions (Cheng, 2000). Therefore, when the participants are not obligated to speak before/during class and could reach their academic goals and receive a fairly good grade essentially through note-taking (Kim, 2006), tests and other ways not involving a high degree of oral class participation, they tend not to take a risk by orally participating in class. Conversely, the participants' comfort level of speaking during class increases when they are asked to speak before/during class.

Also to be taken into consideration is that the participants who do not feel comfortable speaking during class may not be ready to do so; they are not ready to enter into the discourse community created in the classroom, as discussed in Wegner's (1998) study. When incoming graduate students enroll at a new university, especially at a first-tier, research-based university (i.e., The University of Tennessee), they must first learn the norms used in the imagined academic discourse community at that institution, so that they will be able to participate in that community. It was also noticed in this study, that the TGS do not have difficulty in speaking to their instructors or fellow students outside the classroom. Indeed, the findings of the present research study show the opposite viewpoint, compared with that from Ferris and Tagg's (1996) study, which investigated undergraduate and graduate immigrant students ability to communicate with native speakers. In the latter study, the researchers found that Asian students, in particular, had difficulty in communicating with native speakers outside of the classroom.

Unlike the participants' discomfort in speaking to the instructors and fellow students *during* class, however, the majority of the participants feel comfortable when they talk to their instructors or to discuss projects and assignments *after* class. When

speaking to either other students or to their instructors outside of class, their anxiety decreases and their focus shifts from attempting to communicate in perfect English to the accomplishment of academic tasks, such as projects or assignments. When involved in the latter activities, they are able to employ various strategies when interacting with others, such as using appropriate gestures (Myles & Cheng, 2003) or using whatever level of English communicates what they wish to say.

It was also noticed in this study, that the TGS do not have difficulty in speaking to their instructors or fellow students outside the classroom. Indeed, the findings of the present research study show the opposite viewpoint, compared with that from Ferris and Tagg's (1996) study, which investigated undergraduate and graduate students' ability to communicate with native speakers. In the latter study, they found that Asian students had difficulty in communicating with native speakers outside of the classroom.

Taking into consideration the results of the aforementioned study, in the present research study, the TGS degree of comfort in speaking out loud in various academic settings may be related to the following two factors: the TGS level of anxiety and their perceived level of difficulty in becoming a member of the academic discourse community. In Table 4, results of the data analysis indicate that the participants reported that *leading class discussion* ($M=1.85$), *participating in large group discussions* ($M=2.12$), and *giving presentations in front of the class* ($M=2.18$) are the three main items of their discomfort among the 12 academic settings examined on the research instrument. In U.S. academic settings, the ability to achieve these three academic tasks is highly emphasized and is considered to be an essential requirement for success in each academic discipline (reference). Regardless of nationalities, all graduate students are

expected to perform these tasks. Domestic students (i.e., native English speakers) may take hours and hours of studying and preparing materials to meet these tasks.

International students have an additional challenge since their native language is different from the target language in U.S. classrooms. Whenever there is a conflict between international students' level of comfort and content requirements, their anxiety arises as they attempt to accomplish these academic tasks. That may partly explain why the majority of this research study's participants answered *very uncomfortable* or *somewhat uncomfortable* when asked how they perceived performing these tasks.

For the TGS in the present study, the higher the level of comfort that they feel, the more they appear to be willing to participate in the academic community in which they are members. As a corollary, the more comfort they feel, the more motivated they become to more actively engage in communicative activities, both in and out of class. Potentially, when the TGS engage in an academic discussion, not only are their proficiency skills taxed by being required to communicate in academic English, both sending messages to and receiving feedback from others in that community, but they are also expected to contribute their own ideas from their own individual academic knowledge base. Participating in these academic discussions through co-constructing, may lower their discomfort in meeting the challenge of academic tasks.

An examination of the findings in the TGS' ranks on perceived difficulties in academic settings reflects their perception of being full participants in the academic community in their disciplines. Unlike some academic activities conducted in an informal way, the participants' responses on the most difficult academic settings are all required to be conducted in a formal way; that is, they must perform academic tasks as their

instructors expect them to do. However, most participants may not be able to perform these tasks. In addition, perceived expectations from their instructors and their fellow students also play an important role in forming the TGS' rankings on their perceived difficulties in academic settings.

In order to lead discussion in a class, for example, international graduate students not only need to deliver the content knowledge but to address relevant issues and questions raised by their instructors and fellow students. Most importantly, they are expected to dominate the flow of the entire class. International students, therefore, need to spend numerous hours outside of the academic setting so that they can meet their own perception of being a legitimate member of the academic community which is valued by their disciplines (Morita, 2004).

In addition, having a language barrier is one of the plausible explanations in determining the participants' ranks of their perceived difficulties when functioning in academic settings. As discussed above, the highest four ranks of academic activities (as sampled by the research survey in the present study), all require advanced level of speaking proficiency. However, when IGS perform one of the most difficult tasks, they sometimes cannot fully participate, which may cause communication breakdowns during the discourse process.

Participating in large group discussions ranks as the second of the respondents' answers on Part III. When large group discussions are in process, two language activities co-occur; that is, interaction with other interlocutors and taking floor management. Holding the floor is considered essential to be able to participate in the "imagined international community" (Yashima & Zenuk-Nishide, 2008, p. 568) and the "community

of practice” (Wenger, 1998, p. 98). However, TGS may have difficulties in performing such a task. The reason is that unlike talking to interlocutors face-to-face, in a large group discussion, the pace of taking the floor is swift. TGS may have a hard time deciding when and how to intervene in an on-going conversation. For example, when a topic is being discussed, the direction of the floor shifts to the speakers who desire to distribute the related information to all participants, which is considered an indicator of active participation. In addition, participants who have the missing information wait for various discourse markers as signals so they can take the floor to continue the discussion (Jenks, 2007). However, TGS may not be aware of these discourse markers and thus, may consider it difficult to participate in the large group discussions.

The Taiwanese graduate students’ difficulty in fully participating in class may also result from a lack of content preparation for the topics to be discussed or questions to be addressed in class. Unlike giving presentations that allow TGS to fully prepare well in advance, outside of class, 3 out of 4 academic settings (i.e., leading and participating in class discussions, and answering questions in class) can be partially prepared for outside of class but still require TGS’ impromptu responses which might inhibit their motivation to speak up in class. On the other hand, when scrutinizing these required tasks, the TGS consider giving presentations in front of the class to be the *least difficult* task among these four academic tasks. The reason might lie in the fact that prior to giving an academic presentation, the TGS most probably spend quite a long time rehearsing their presentation to make sure their audience understands the content of the presentation. Furthermore, speaking in front of the class improves their language proficiency. They may consider it an opportunity to improve their speaking ability in spite of being anxious

when speaking in front of the class. Most importantly, it is considered a channel to demonstrate their content area knowledge and to inform the audience of their desire to become a member of the academic community (Morita, 2004).

The findings in Part IV of the survey have suggested that language abilities ranging from communicating with peers to listening skills seem to play an important role in determining TGS' willingness to participate in class activities. In this study, graduate students from Engineering consist of 42.5% (N=17) of the total TGS. Based on the research findings of Tsui (2004), lacking interaction with domestic students may partially explain their answers on items 11 and 12 (Both of these items dealt with listening skills in the academic setting.) In most cases, graduate students with Engineering majors spend much of their time after school at the lab. Therefore, they may lack interaction with domestic students in class which may potentially affect their language abilities. This is corroborated by Liu's (2000) findings.

TGS' perception of difficulty concerning pronunciation also influences their willingness to participate in various academic settings. When reviewing the TGS' responses on Part I of the research survey, which asked which language skills were more emphasized (in Taiwan) before they enrolled at The University of Tennessee, *none* of the participants answered speaking and listening. Instead, *all* of the participants answered reading or writing or both. Their responses suggest that pronunciation as well as speaking skills were not the primary concern in their previous formal education in Taiwan. Therefore, they might not feel comfortable to orally participate in class activities due to their accent. In addition, TGS are concerned about whether their accent will make them

lose face in front of the class. Since these two factors are intertwined, the TGS may not be willing to orally participate in class activities.

While some of the findings from the present research study agree with previous research, including saving face (Liu, 2001) and executing proper pronunciation (Devita, 2000; Liu, 1998), the present study shows a different view on how cultural norms affect oral participation. Many researchers' attribute the lack of oral participation to Asians' alleged cultural constraints (Cheng, 2000), which include Confucius' teaching and learning styles. However, in the findings of the present study, the participants do *not* consider these cultural norms as being the major factors influencing their oral participation. Traditional Chinese students show great respect for teachers and rarely raise question in class, out of respect. Thus, many researchers conclude that Asian students would not be active participants in class activities. However, in the present study, the TGS suggest that showing respect for instructors in class is the *least* potential factor that influences their oral participation.

One of this study's findings that disagrees with previous studies on the topic is that class size seems to be less important in TGS' responses. Theoretically, due to their own personal time constraints, graduate students have less interaction with their fellow students or instructors in a larger class (Ferris, 1998). On the contrary, when a class has fewer students, students might have more opportunities to orally participate in group discussions. However, one of the finding from this study concerning this factor reports that class size does not affect TGS' willingness to actively participate in class participation. The reason might be that there are only 40 students in this study and almost half of them are engineering majors (Vinke & Jochems, 2005). The content for

engineering majors places a strong emphasis on lectures when compared with other disciplines.

It is also worth noting that the TGS in the present study do not consider the factor of feeling alienated (i.e., not part of the academic community) in a class to be an influential factor that affect their willingness to orally participate in class. This is different from the findings reported from previous research (Perrucci & Hu, 1995; Sam, 2001). The reason for this might be due to the fact that in graduate class seminars, instructors put a heavy emphasis on group discussion and individual work (e.g., academic presentations). Thus, international as well as domestic graduate students may gather to discuss their projects and assignments after class. By doing so, IGS will not be excluded but share and contribute to the knowledge base of the group.

Chapter Summary

This chapter analyzed the data collected from the Taiwanese graduate students (TGS) participants in this study which aimed to explore their perceived difficulties in speaking in various academic settings, and answered the three research questions which guided this study.

The TGS suggested that they do not feel comfortable in participating in class activities during class, yet feel comfortable in engaging in various academic activities outside of class. The subjects also indicated that their perceived speaking difficulties are, in order from most difficult to least difficult: leading class discussion, participating in large group discussion, answering questions in class, and giving academic presentations. In addition, the TGS also implied that their language ability is their primary potential factor that influences their willingness to orally participate in an academic setting.

The researcher then discussed the findings of the study at the end of this chapter and presented plausible explanations for them, when possible, based on previous studies. Chapter V will present a summary of the study, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further research, based on the findings of the study.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter is the final of five chapters of the research study, which had as its primary focus the examination of speaking difficulties that Taiwanese graduate students perceived as having while in academic settings at The University of Tennessee. It is divided into four sections: the Summary, Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations for Further Research.

Summary

Liu (2000) and Ferris and Tagg (1996) report that cultural factors play an important role in determining international students willingness to participate in class activities. The results of the present study, however, report that the Taiwanese Graduate Students' lack of voluntary oral class participation is not due solely to cultural influences, but may also be an artifact of basic communicative skills in a discourse community.

The purpose of this study was to explore TGS perceived speaking difficulties and the potential factors that influence their oral participation in the post-secondary academic arena. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How comfortable do Taiwanese graduate students feel in academic situations in this study?
2. Of all international students' perceived speaking difficulties, which ones are the most difficult as perceived by Taiwanese graduate students?
3. Which factors have a major impact on international students' speaking performance in academic settings?

Review of the Literature

The review of the literature supports the assumption that increasing the amount of interaction between students and instructors may strengthen their oral participation skills in various academic settings (Han, 2007). In addition, Swales' (1990) concept of a discourse community partially illustrates the reasons for international students' perceived speaking difficulties in the classroom. In order to better understand the interrelationship among different approaches to international students' lack of oral participation, the researcher reviewed previous studies on: (1) NNES' interactions with listeners; (2) the notion of discourse community; (3) cultural beliefs impacting oral participation; (4) the communication between instructors and international students; and (5) international students' social adjustment to the target language's discourse community.

Research Design

For the methodology of the study, a quantitative approach was adopted. This study was viewed as an extension of previous studies conducted by Ferris (1996) and Liu (2000), with the differences being that the present study specifically addressed Taiwanese graduate students' oral participation in academic settings. In order to address the research questions undergirding this study, the principal investigator employed a quantitative research approach. A survey adapted from Ferris' (1996) instrument and drawing from Liu's (2000) research was used to collect the TGS' responses for the present study. The data were collected during December 2008 to January, 2009, coded and analyzed using the statistical package SPSS 17.0. In this study, 40 Taiwanese graduate students were recruited to participate in the survey. The return rate was 100%.

Findings

As a result of the data analysis, the following findings were identified. First, in answering the first research question, *How comfortable do Taiwanese graduate students feel in academic situations in this study?*, the participants reported feeling more comfortable participating in *after-class* academic activities than in *in-class* activities. The reason for this might be that they did not feel comfortable when engaging in formal academic activities (e.g., large group discussion or answering questions) in class, and in fact, felt more anxious when doing so. Second, the TGS' level of comfort seems to have depended upon their amount of interaction with their fellow students or instructors (see Table 4). The more the TGS interacted with other students and faculty, the more they felt that they were able to contribute some of their own knowledge to the academic task at hand (e.g., a group project). Furthermore, the TGS might view this interaction process as an opportunity to ameliorate their speaking proficiency (Mackey, 2002) which was presented in the published research as being beneficial to both international and domestic students in academic venues (Trice, 2004). Most importantly, these after-class academic activities might be viewed as a form of "peripheral participation" (Lave & Wenger, 1998, p. 14). Finally, the findings drawn from this study also indicated that the TGS with engineering majors felt the least comfortable of all of the other academic majors when engaging in in-class oral participation activities, perhaps due to the fact that they had been more accustomed to a lecture classroom setting rather than a highly interactive classroom discussion or question and answer setting (Armstrong & Boud, 1983; Ferris & Tagg, 1996).

With regard to the second research question, *Of all international students' perceived speaking difficulties, which ones are the most difficult as perceived by Taiwanese graduate students?*, the findings reveal that in-class academic speaking skills were the most difficult as perceived by TGS. These skills included: leading class discussions, participating in large group discussions, answering questions in class, and giving presentations in front of the class. The reasons underlying this finding might be that the TGS' perceived speaking proficiency was different from their own perceived expectations of the level of speaking proficiency that a competent academic participant should have. Therefore, this finding might illustrate the TGS' reticence or lack of willingness (McCroskey, 1992) to participate in the classroom's oral discourse community (Morita, 2000) and their efforts to meet this challenge of utilizing a variety of coping strategies (Horwitz, 2001; Zappa-Hollman, 2007), one of which may be silence (Cheng, 2004; Tatar, 2005).

In responding to the third research question, *Which factors have a major impact on international students' speaking performance in academic settings?*, the researcher discovered that cultural factors actually played a *minor* role in TGS' willingness to engage in speaking activities in academic settings (as opposed to the research findings of Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Flowerdew & Miller, 1995; Jenkins, 2001; Tsui, 1996) rather, their language skills (Tsou, 2005) and content knowledge rather than cultural attributes (Tatar, 2005) determined their level of willingness to orally attend to and freely participate in class activities. The researcher attributed TGS' silence in class to their perceived lack of feeling competent to openly engage in speaking activities in their academic discourse community. The researcher speculates that on the TGS' continuum of participation in

their academic disciplines, the TGS considered factors such as language skills and content knowledge as being a threshold or even an entrée to gaining full status as a competent member (i.e., self—perceived) of their academic communities (Kanno & Norton, 2003).

Conclusions

Throughout this entire research study, the researcher was guided by a number of theories, including the *interaction approach to speaking proficiency*, Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of legitimate *peripheral participation*, and Swale's (1990) concept of *discourse community*. For Taiwanese graduate students or International graduate students in general, attaining native-like speaking proficiency through active involvement in various academic settings, is a long and arduous process. This process can be placed on an oral participation continuum (with involves interaction with other students and with instructors), with asking instructors questions after class (the easiest function) on one end of it, and leading class discussion (the most difficult function) on the other end (see Figure 2).

The researcher noticed that despite fulfilling admission requirements (i.e., TOEFL, GRE, or GMAT) at The University of Tennessee, the TGS lacked experience in orally participating in academic activities before they were enrolled on The University of Tennessee campus. Therefore, when the TGS were first enrolled at UT as graduate students, they were consciously reminded that they would be expected to become full participating members of the discourse communities in all of their new university academic settings. One of the safe approaches they most probably started with was to

participate in activities that they felt most comfortable with; Lave and Wenger (1991) addressed this as *legitimate peripheral participation* in a situated community.

The principal investigator also recognized the fact that while many researchers (e.g., Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Ferris & Tagg, 1996) sought to attribute international students' lack of oral participation in class as an artifact of cultural inhibition, the researcher of the present study found that this particular silence could be a result of more than just a cultural challenge. He speculates, in fact, that the TGS' cultural values' impact on the subjects' level of participation in academic settings lessened as the TGS' level of exposure to lectures and various academic activities increased and the TGS' activities became more academically task-oriented .

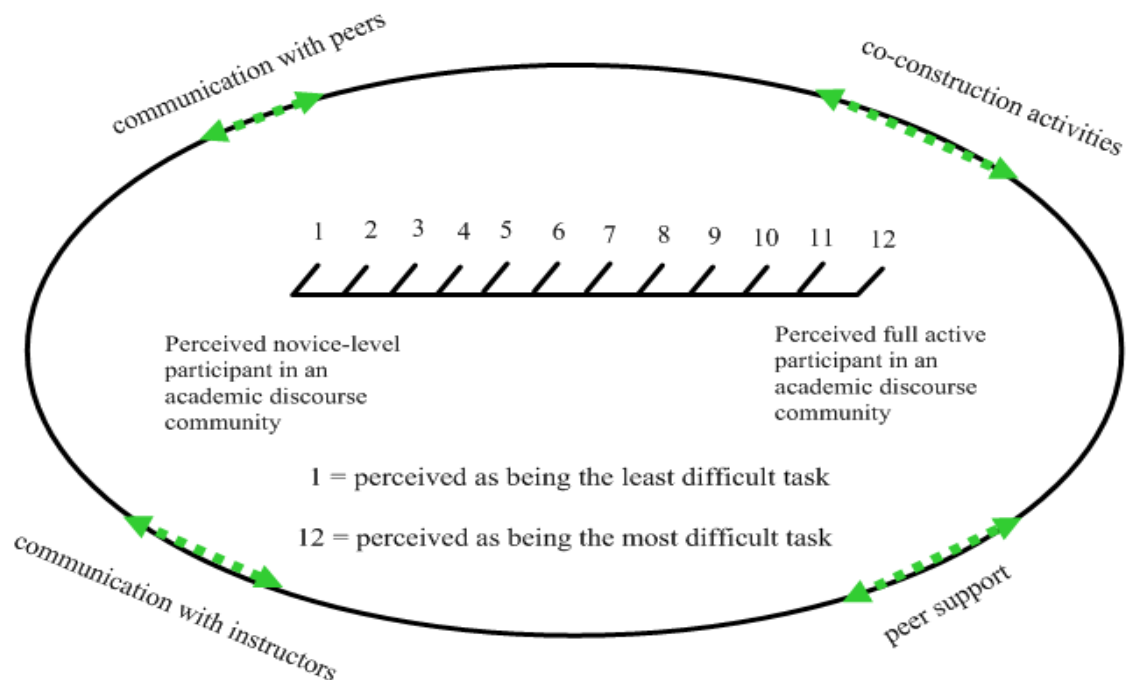


Figure 2

Participants' Oral Participation Continuum

Also noted by the researcher was that the academic relationship between international students and their instructors and peer support of fellow (domestic) graduate students, are two important factors which have a direct impact on the TGS' development of speaking proficiency. According to inferences drawn from the data by the principal investigator, it appears that the more comfortable the TGS became in their new academic discourse communities, the more comfortable they felt taking an active participation role in the classroom.

Implications

When the present study was first designed, the researcher hoped that the findings could raise awareness of international students' perceived speaking difficulties in class. The findings, in fact, suggest that the TGS' level of discomfort in oral participation activities in academic settings largely resulted from the different levels of challenge they met in various in-class academic activities. One of the potential ways to ease their discomfort would be to introduce English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classes to international students in addition to their regular content courses. The EAP class is considered to be a valuable resource for international graduate students (IGS) as they are inducted into new academic settings in a different target language and country (Liu, 1998). In this special type of class, EAP instructors are trained to inform IGS how to use new coping strategies as they become members of the academic discourse communities in U.S. post-secondary institutions. The EAP instructors, for example, can show IGS how to take the lead in class discussions, participate in question and answer periods in class and give oral reports in class. When IGS are taught these skills, they are more likely to transfer them to their regular content area courses. When they are expected to perform

a similar task in the latter, they know how to meet the challenge. For most international students, however, attending EAP classes may be a challenge for them due to the inavailability of these classes and/or the ability of international students to matriculate additional course work.

As the data from the present study indicated, the TGS often or always felt alienated in various academic settings. To some degree, their personalities may have played a role in their level and quality of oral participation; however, research on this topic reports that the majority of IGS' desire to be included and be capable of sharing their own knowledge base in their new discourse communities (Perrucci & Hu, 1995). Therefore, support from the content area instructors and peers is highly recommended to ease IGS' feeling of alienation. To do this, however, instructors could assign small-group projects in class, to include IGS with domestic students. When the IGS actively participate in task-oriented discussions, such as these, they are more likely to interact with their group mates, which in turn may increase the IGS' sense of belonging to and becoming a valued member of the new academic community.

In addition, Hall (1995) and Mackey (2002) reported that oral proficiency occurs during the process of interacting with Native English Speakers (NES). When academic relationships and peer support are established, it is easier for IGS to fully participate in their discourse socialization process (Morita, 2000). During this period, domestic students, as well as content course instructors, may feel more supportive and empathetic when they perceive that IGS are having difficulties in engaging in academic activities and then be able to accommodate them.

In sum, for this researcher, the findings in this study indicate that interaction with the TGS' fellow students and instructors before and after class helped them establish their perceived identity as novice members of their new academic discourse communities. Additionally, with support from their instructors and peers, they could ultimately ameliorate their speaking difficulties in various academic settings, feel more comfortable in their in-class communication activities with other students and instructors, be able to contribute their own content area expertise in the classroom, become more competitive with other students, and ultimately become productive, full active participants in their new academic discourse communities (as previously illustrated in Figure 2).

Recommendations for Further Research

Given the fact that the graduate student subjects for this research study consisted of only 40 participants from Taiwan, the findings cannot be generalized to all international students from different parts of the world at The University of Tennessee. To obtain more generalizable results, the study should be conducted by including a greater number and variety of international graduate students (e.g., from China, Japan, and Korea). Furthermore, additional data-collecting methodologies would need to be conducted, instead of using simple descriptive statistics to analyze data collected by two rounds of a modified Delphi instrument. Given a larger and more diverse grand population, additional research approaches could also include more robust quantitative approaches which would be able to use more sophisticated statistical analyzes (i.e., ANOVA and factor analysis). Factor analysis, for example, could be used to successfully identify which particular factors might influence international graduate students' willingness to participate in speaking activities in academic settings.

In addition, a future study could include a qualitative approach, incorporating, but not being restricted, to in-class observations and out-of-class focus group and individual interviews in order to triangulate the data. Of particular interest to this researcher, would be to carefully and thoughtfully examine the relationship between IGS and other students and the interaction between IGS and their instructors. When observations or interviews are employed, the research questions could be more thoroughly investigated because international graduate students experience difficulties (i.e., entering different discourse communities) on a daily basis. As Janesick (2000) states, when taking their daily experiences into consideration, researchers would be able to better understand the given social setting.

Finally, the present study may not adequately address all issues related to TGS' perceived speaking difficulties in academic settings. For example, the researcher does not address TGS' academic relationships with instructors and peers in relation to levels of perceived speaking difficulty on the survey instruments. However, as Leki (2006) noted, international students' level of comfort on socio-academic relationship influences their learning process. By addressing this point, further researchers would be able to identify findings to support these under-explored issues.

Chapter Summary

This chapter summarized Chapters 1 through 4. This chapter presented a summary of the present study, conclusions and implications that can be drawn from its results and recommendations for further research on the topic. A list of references, bibliography appendices and the researcher's *vita* follow this chapter.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Instrument Survey

UT Taiwanese Graduate Students' Perceived Difficulties in Speaking in English for Academic Purpose Setting

The purpose of this survey is to collect information about Taiwanese graduate students' perceived difficulties in speaking in an academic setting. For each of the following questions, please select the answer that best describe you. You will not be asked your name or any other identifying information.

I. Please tell me some *background information* about you. Please place a check that best describes you.

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

2. How many years have you been enrolled at The University of Tennessee:

☐ <1 year ☐ 1-2 year ☐ 3-4 years ☐ 5-6 years ☐ >6 years

3. What is your major: _____

4. Before enrolling at UT, how many years had you studied English?

☐ 12-14 years ☐ 15-17 years ☐ 18-20 years ☐ 21-23 years

5. Which English academic language skill was more emphasized by schools attended before enrolling at The University of Tennessee?

☐ Listening ☐ Speaking ☐ Reading ☐ Writing ☐ Reading & Writing

II. Some international students feel uncomfortable when speaking in a variety of situations, such as raising questions in class or going to instructor's office for questions. HOW COMFORTABLE do you feel speaking in the following academic situations? Please place a check on the following 5-point scale to describe your comfortableness in speaking.

[1= *very uncomfortable*, 2= *somewhat uncomfortable*, 3= *neutral*, 4= *somewhat comfortable*, 5=*very comfortable*]

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Asking instructors questions before class	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Asking instructors question during class	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Asking instructors questions after class	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Talking with the instructor in his/her office	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. Asking fellow students questions before class	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. Asking fellow students question during class	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. Asking fellow students question after class	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. Interacting with fellow students on out-of-class projects or assignments	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. Answering questions in class	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. Giving presentations in front of the class	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. Participating in large group discussions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12. Leading class discussions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

III. Which of the following do you perceive as your greatest difficulties in an academic setting? Please review the list of choices and RANK your top four answers (1-4, *with 1 being the greatest*).

- _____ Asking instructors questions before class
- _____ Asking instructors questions during class
- _____ Asking instructors questions after class
- _____ Talking with the instructor in his/her office
- _____ Asking fellow students questions before class
- _____ Asking fellow students questions during class
- _____ Asking fellow students questions after class
- _____ Answering questions in class
- _____ Interacting with fellow students on out-of-class projects and assignments.
- _____ Participating in large group discussion
- _____ Leading class discussions

IV. Some international students feel uncomfortable in orally participating in classroom activities (e.g., asking and answering questions, working in small-group discussions, giving presentations, speaking in large-group discussion). The following questions are some reported factors that may affect your oral class participation. Please place a check that indicates the extent to which you feel these statements affect your oral class participation.

[1= **Rarely**, 2= **Sometimes**, 3= **Often**, 4= **Very often**, 5= **Always**]

- | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. My level of understanding of content and background knowledge affects my willingness to orally participate in classroom activities. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2. My ethnicity affects my willingness to orally participate in classroom activities. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3. Peer pressure affects my willingness to orally participate in classroom activities. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

[1= Rarely, 2= Sometimes, 3= Often, 4= Very often, 5= Always]

- | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 4. Instructors' teaching styles affects my willingness to orally participate in classroom activities. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 5. My confidence in English pronunciation affects my willingness to orally participate in classroom activities. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 6. My heavy course load affects my willingness in participating in classroom activities. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 7. I do not speak with my American peers because I do not have strong motivation to improve my speaking skills. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 8. I am afraid to orally participate in classroom activities because I will lose face if my instructor or fellow students cannot understand me. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 9. I consider that being silent is to show my respect for instructors in class. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 10. My past experience in classroom participation in my home country affects my oral classroom participation. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 11. My listening skills affect my oral classroom participation. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 12. My general English ability (e.g., expressing thoughts, communicating with American peers) affects my oral classroom participation. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 13. My level of accuracy in speaking English affects my oral classroom participation. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 14. I am concerned with the quality of my speaking when I participate in classroom activities. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 15. The size of class affects my willingness to orally participate classroom activities. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

[1= **Rarely**, 2= **Sometimes**, 3= **Often**, 4= **Very often**, 5= **Always**]

	1	2	3	4	5
16. I feel shy and uncomfortable when orally participating in classroom activities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17. Feeling alienated in a class affects my willingness to orally participate in classroom activities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18. My perception of a good learner (e.g., attentive listening, not-taking, being quiet in a class) affects me when orally participating in classroom activities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
19. I consider seeking correct answers to an instructor's questions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
20. My interest in content area courses affects my oral class participation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

V. What are other factors in oral class participation which you feel should be addressed for Taiwanese graduate students at The University of Tennessee?

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey.

Appendix B

Permission Letter from Professor Ferris

From: Ferris, Dana R <ferrisd@skymail.csus.edu>
To: Frank Chen <franktchen@gmail.com>,
Date: Tuesday, February 5, 2008 at 5:34 PM
Subject: RE: Permission to use your survey questions
mailed-by: skymail.csus.edu
Reply:

Dear Frank,

Yes, feel free to use them and thanks for asking. I would be interested in hearing about your findings. Good luck with your research!

Best wishes,
Dana Ferris

From: Frank Chen [franktchen@gmail.com]
Sent: Monday, February 4, 2008 2:02 PM
To: ferrisd@csus.edu
Subject: Permission to use your survey questions

Dear Dr. Ferris,

My name is Frank Chen. I am a Ph.D. student in the College of Education at the University of Tennessee. I am currently preparing for the instrument for my dissertation study. My major advisor is Dr. Davis-Wiley. My tentative dissertation title is: UT International students' perceived difficulties in speaking in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) setting. For this study, I will mainly focus on the international graduate students from Southeast Asia.

My interest has always been in the difficulties and factors that may prevent international graduate students from participating in class activities, such as in-class discussion and giving presentations. As you may know, International students from Southeast Asia encounter speaking difficulties in academic settings. To explore their speaking difficulties, I would like to use parts of the survey questions in the title "Academic listening/speaking tasks for ESL students: problems, suggestions, and implications" and adapt them to the instrument for my data collection. It will be greatly appreciated if you permit me to use them. Thank you.

Frank

Appendix C

FORM A

Certification for Exemption from IRB Review for Research Involving Human Subjects

A. PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Tai-Ming (Frank) Chen

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Patricia Davis-Wiley, Professor of Theory and Practice in Teacher Education, College of Education, WL/ESL Education

B. DEPARTMENT: College of Education, Health and Human Sciences

C. COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS AND PHONE NUMBER OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

6721 Strawberry Plains Pike

Knoxville, TN 37914

tchen6@utk.edu

(865)607-8976

D. TITLE OF PROJECT: UTK Taiwanese Graduate Students' Perceived Difficulties in Speaking in English for Academic Purpose Setting

E. EXTERNAL FUNDING AGENCY AND ID NUMBER: N/A

F. GRANT SUBMISSION DEADLINE: N/A

G. STARTING DATE: Upon IRB approval

H. ESTIMATED COMPLETION DATE: May 2009

I. RESEARCH PROJECT

1. Objectives of Project: The purpose of this study is:

- to examine perceived speaking difficulties that Taiwanese international graduate students may experience in post-secondary academic settings, and
- to investigate which cluster(s) of factors may influence Taiwanese international graduate students' speaking performance in various academic settings.

2. Subjects:

- a. The potential subjects in this study will be approximately 40 Taiwanese international graduate students at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
- b. The principal investigator (PI) will recruit male and female graduate students with assistance from the Taiwanese Student Association.

3. Methods or Procedures:

- a. The Principal Investigator will conduct a pilot study of the survey instrument (Appendix A) with 4-5 (non-Taiwanese) international graduate students at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. These students will be invited to voluntarily complete the instrument that will be used to collect data for this research study so that the PI can further refine it following feedback from them. A letter of invitation (Appendix B) to participate in the pilot study will accompany the survey. The identities of those students participating in the pilot study will be protected and the data collected from this study will not be reported in any way. The sole purpose of the pilot study is to inform a more refined version of the survey to be used with the target population in this study.
 - b. Following refinement of the instrument, the Principal Investigator will then receive an email list of student members of the Taiwanese Student Association at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, from the President of the Association.
 - c. The PI will then send out an email to the members of the Taiwanese Student Association describing the study in detail (Appendix C) and an invitation (Appendix D) to voluntarily participate in the research study. A hard copy of the survey and the Informed Consent Form (along with a stamped, self-addressed envelope) will be subsequently mailed to the participants 3 days after the email has been sent out. The returned surveys will then be separated from the Informed Consent Forms to ensure anonymity. A follow-up survey will then be sent to those participants who had not returned the completed survey within a 10-day period. Once those surveys are returned, they will be shuffled in with the other surveys to ensure that the subjects' identities will not be associated with their completed surveys.
 - d. The instrument consists of 5 parts. Part I and Part II solicit basic demographic information (i.e., gender; UT student classification; academic major; length of study at The University of Tennessee). Part III and Part IV consist of 20 items answerable on a 5-point frequency scale. Part V of the survey consists of one open-ended question.
 - e. The completed survey instruments and signed Informed Consent Forms will be returned to the PI in self-addressed, stamped envelopes. The responses will be collected and sent to the PI along with the Informed Consent form.
 - f. Data collected from the mailed-in surveys will be coded and analyzed with SPSS on a personal computer. The researcher will analyze the data using descriptive statistics. The demographic information and students' length of studying English in Part I and Part II will be reported in a summary, describing subjects' residence and educational backgrounds. Answers to the research questions related to Taiwanese graduate students' perceived difficulties in Part III and Part IV will be analyzed to identify percentages and means for the close-ended items on the survey. The last part of the survey, an open-ended question, will be analyzed using qualitative methodology. All the data used in this study will only be accessible to the PI. Upon the completion of the study, all data will be shredded.
4. CATEGORY(S) FOR EXEMPT RESEARCH PER 45 CFR 46: The research described herein entitles this research project to certification as exempt from review by the Institutional Review Board. The only involvement of human subjects is on the effectiveness of integrating international students' perceived difficulties into instructors' teaching at an academic setting. Citing paragraph 1 under 45 CFR 46:

(1) Research conducted in established or commonly-accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as: (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

This deems this project exempt from IRB review.

5. CERTIFICATION: The research described herein is in compliance with 45 CFR 46.101(b) and presents subjects with no more than minimal risk as defined by applicable regulations. The information found in the study will be used as a doctoral dissertation. Furthermore, it may be published in research journals or may be presented at professional conferences. Any information provided that could reveal the participants' identities, will remain confidential and anonymous in any published materials.

Principal Investigator: _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Student Advisor: _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Department Review Committee Chair: _____

Signature _____ Date _____

APPROVED:

Department Head: _____

Signature _____ Date _____

UT Taiwanese Students' Perceived Difficulties in Speaking in English for Academic Purpose Setting

The purpose of this survey is to collect information about Taiwanese graduate students' perceived difficulties in speaking in an academic setting. For each of the following questions, please select the answer that best describe you. You will not be asked your name or any other identifying information.

I. Please tell me some *background information* about you. Please place a check that best describes you.

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

2. How many years have you been enrolled at The University of Tennessee:

☐ <1 year ☐ 1-2 year ☐ 3-4 years ☐ 5-6 years ☐ >6 years

3. What is your major: _____

4 Before enrolling at UT, how many years had you studied English?

☐ <1 year ☐ 1-2 year ☐ 3-4 years ☐ 5-6 years ☐ >6 years

6. Which English academic language skill was more emphasized by schools attended before enrolling at The University of Tennessee?

☐ Listening ☐ Speaking ☐ Reading ☐ Writing

II. Some international students feel uncomfortable when speaking in a variety of situations, such as raising questions in class or going to instructor's office for questions. HOW COMFORTABLE do you feel speaking in the following academic situations? Please place a check on the following 5-point scale to describe your comfortableness in speaking.

[1= *very uncomfortable*, 2= *somewhat uncomfortable*, 3= *neutral*, 4= *somewhat comfortable*, 5=*very comfortable*]

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Asking instructors questions before class	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Asking instructors question during class	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Asking instructors questions after class	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Talking with the instructor in his/her office	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. Asking fellow students questions before class	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. Asking fellow students question during class	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. Asking fellow students question after class	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. Interacting with fellow students on out-of-class projects or assignments	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. Answering questions in class	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. Giving presentations in front of the class	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. Participating in large group discussions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12. Leading class discussions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

III. Which of the following do you perceive as your greatest difficulties in an academic setting? Please review the list of choices and RANK your top four answers (1-4, *with 1 being the greatest*).

- _____ Asking instructors questions before class
- _____ Asking instructors questions during class
- _____ Asking instructors questions after class
- _____ Talking with the instructor in his/her office
- _____ Asking fellow students questions before class
- _____ Asking fellow students questions during class
- _____ Asking fellow students questions after class
- _____ Answering questions in class
- _____ Interacting with fellow students on out-of-class projects and assignments.
- _____ Participating in large group discussion
- _____ Leading class discussions

IV. Some international students feel uncomfortable in orally participating in classroom activities (e.g., asking and answering questions, working in small-group discussions, giving presentations, speaking in large-group discussion). The following questions are some reported factors that may affect your oral class participation. Please place a check that indicates the extent to which you feel these statements affect your oral class participation.

[1= **Rarely**, 2= **Sometimes**, 3= **Often**, 4= **Very often**, 5= **Always**]

- | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. My level of understanding of content and background knowledge affects my willingness to orally participate in classroom activities. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2. My ethnicity affects my willingness to orally participate in classroom activities. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3. Peer pressure affects my willingness to orally participate in classroom activities. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

[1= Rarely, 2= Sometimes, 3= Often, 4= Very often, 5= Always]

- | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 4. Instructors' teaching styles affects my willingness to orally participate in classroom activities. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 5. My confidence in English pronunciation affects my willingness to orally participate in classroom activities. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 6. My heavy course load affects my willingness in participating in classroom activities. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 7. I do not speak with my American peers because I do not have strong motivation to improve my speaking skills. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 8. I am afraid to orally participate in classroom activities because I will lose face if my instructor or fellow students cannot understand me. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 9. I consider that being silent is to show my respect for instructors in class. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 10. My past experience in classroom participation in my home country affects my oral classroom participation. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 11. My listening skills affect my oral classroom participation. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 12. My general English ability (e.g., expressing thoughts, communicating with American peers) affects my oral classroom participation. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 13. My level of accuracy in speaking English affects my oral classroom participation. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 14. I am concerned with the quality of my speaking when I participate in classroom activities. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 15. The size of class affects my willingness to orally participate classroom activities. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

[1= **Rarely**, 2= **Sometimes**, 3= **Often**, 4= **Very often**, 5= **Always**]

	1	2	3	4	5
16. I feel shy and uncomfortable when orally participating in classroom activities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17. Feeling alienated in a class affects my willingness to orally participate in classroom activities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18. My perception of a good learner (e.g., attentive listening, not-taking, being quiet in a class) affects me when orally participating in classroom activities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
19. I consider seeking correct answers to an instructor's questions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
20. My interest in content area courses affects my oral class participation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

V. What are other factors in oral class participation which you feel should be addressed for Taiwanese graduate students at The University of Tennessee?

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey.

Pilot Study Cover Letter

Dear Participant,

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this pilot study. The attached survey is part of my dissertation research study entitled *UT Taiwanese Graduate Students' Perceived Difficulties in Speaking in an English for Academic Purpose Setting*.

Despite receiving instruction in English for a long time in Taiwan, it seems that being unfamiliar with the U.S. academic system, and feeling uncomfortable when orally participating in classroom activities may hinder Taiwanese students from full class participation in American institutions.

Specifically, the purpose of my study is to examine Taiwanese graduate students' perceived difficulties in speaking in classroom settings at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. In order to conduct a study with a better quality survey to be used in my dissertation study, I would like to invite you to participate in the piloting of this survey. Your input on this survey is extremely helpful in this study and is greatly appreciated.

After completing this survey, please mail it to me in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope. Thank you for participating in this research study. Please be assured that your identity will remain anonymous and will never be revealed and the data collected from your completed survey will not be reported in any way.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact me at tchen6@utk.edu or (865) 607-8976 for further information.

I understand you are extremely busy with your school responsibilities at this time of the semester and I would be most grateful for your participation in my study.

Sincerely,

Tai-Ming (Frank) Chen
Ph.D. Candidate
World Language / ESL Education

Informed Consent

UT Taiwanese Students' Perceived Difficulties in Speaking in English for Academic Purpose Setting

Dear Participants,

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of my study is to examine Taiwanese graduate students' perceived difficulties in speaking in classroom settings at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Specifically, this study asks for your perspective concerning what factors may affect your speaking out loud in various academic settings when you participate in classroom activities at UT.

INFORMATION

In this study, you will be asked to complete a survey sent to you in the mail. Completion of the survey will take you 5-10 minutes to complete. Once you have completed the survey, please include it *and* the signed informed consent form in the stamped envelope which is addressed to me, the researcher in this study. Upon receipt of the survey and informed consent form, all responses will be coded and analyzed. When the analysis is completed at the end of the study, all surveys and consent forms will be destroyed.

RISKS

There are minimal risks involved in participating in this study. The information found in the study will be used as a doctoral dissertation. Furthermore, it may be published in research journals or may be presented at professional conferences. Any information provided that could reveal your identity, including your name, will remain confidential and anonymous in any published materials.

BENEFITS

The findings of the study can contribute to the body of knowledge about international students' perceived speaking difficulties in academic settings. In addition, the findings can also potentially raise instructors' awareness on how to help international students when they encounter speaking difficulties in the classroom. Lastly, this study will help schools as a whole to develop curricula that may accommodate international students adapt to academic settings.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All of the data collected and analyzed in this study will be stored and kept securely in a locked file drawer in the principal investigator's home office and will only be accessible to him. Under no circumstances will the subjects' identities be disclosed or identified in any way in this study or following its completion. Upon completion of the study, the data will be destroyed.

CONTACT

If you have any questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you are welcome to contact the principal researcher, Frank Chen, at 6721 Strawberry Plains Pike, Knoxville, TN 37914 and tchen6@utk.edu. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, please contact the Research Compliance Service section of the Office of Research Compliance Officer at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, at 865-974-3466.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. Also, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study before data are processed, your data will be deleted from the study. Return of the completed survey constitutes your consent to participate.

Tai-Ming (Frank) Chen
Ph.D. Candidate
World Language / ESL Education
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Letter of Invitation to Participate in the Study

Dear _____,

My name is Tai-Ming (Frank) Chen. I am a doctoral candidate in ESL Education at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville and I would like to ask for your participation in my Ph.D. doctoral study.

As you know, in Taiwan, students receive English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education when they turn 13 years old. Despite receiving instruction in English for several years, however, it seems that being unfamiliar with the U.S. academic system and being uncomfortable when orally participating in English may hinder Taiwanese students from full class participation in American post-secondary classrooms. The purpose of my study is to examine Taiwanese graduate students' perceived difficulties in participating in class discussions at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

The enclosed survey will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. You will receive a hard copy of the survey and an informed consent form by mail between late November and early December of 2008. Hopefully, you will choose to complete and return the survey by mail to me in the provided self-addressed, stamped envelope. In appreciation for your participation in my study, you will receive a small gift from me.

Participating in this study will help instructors at The University of Tennessee and other post-secondary institutions, better understand what Taiwanese students' speaking difficulties are and subsequently potentially help international/Taiwanese students cope with these speaking difficulties.

I deeply appreciate your time and willingness to participate in this study. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact me at tchen6@utk.edu or (865) 607-8976 for further information. If you would like me to schedule a meeting with you or to call you to more fully explain the study so that you can be better informed with the objective of the study, I will be delighted to do so.

I do understand that at this time of the semester you are extremely busy with your school responsibilities and am consequently very appreciative of your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Tai-Ming (Frank) Chen
Ph.D. Candidate
World Language / ESL Education
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Appendix D

Please Help Me Graduate

Dear TSA 的同學們，

我想請大家幫一個忙，我現在正在寫我的論文。資料收集的部份我想請大家幫我填寫一份問卷。我的論文題目是有關於從台灣來的研究所學生在UT所遇到的口說的困難。

以下是我的題目的介紹。

As you know, students receive English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education when they turn 13 years old. Despite receiving instruction in English for several years, however, it seems that being unfamiliar with the U.S. academic system and being uncomfortable when orally participating in English may hinder Taiwanese students from full class participation in American post-secondary classrooms. The purpose of my study is to examine Taiwanese graduate students' perceived difficulties in participating in class discussions at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

如果你願意幫我填寫問卷，請你按回覆郵件，我會將問卷用郵寄的方式寄給你，你的參與於否對我非常重要，如果未達到預定的人數，我將無法在預定的時間完成我的論文。謝謝你們的幫忙。

Frank

VITA

Tai-Ming (Frank) Chen, Ph.D. candidate in Education with a concentration in Literacy, Language Education, and ESL (English as a Second Language) Education at The University of Tennessee, will earn his degree in May, 2009.

After graduating in 1994 from National Chin-Yi University of Technology in Taiwan, with a B.S., he realized that learning English was his main academic interest and decided to change his career track from Engineering to English. He subsequently received his B.A. in English in 1995 and his M.S. in English in 2001 from Providence University, Taiwan.

While studying at Providence University, during his second year in the master's program, he became certified to teach English on the middle and high school levels. Upon receiving his M.A., he taught English for 3 years at Glad Tidings Bible College (GTBC), a well-known private institution in the central part of Taiwan. This 3-year teaching experience at GTBC was invaluable to his career, where he learned how to better integrate his expertise and knowledge base into an English curriculum.

In 2004, Frank and his wife, Cheri, decided to come to the United States to seek advanced graduate degrees. He subsequently enrolled as a Ph.D. student at The University of Tennessee in the fall of 2004.

For the past 5 years, Frank has worked at different venues at The University of Tennessee. First, he served as a graduate assistant at the International House between 2005-2007 and then as a program coordinator and instructor at the English Language Institute for 1 ½ years. Currently, he is a Chinese teacher at Hardin Valley Academy, a large public high school in Knoxville, Tennessee.