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An Investigation Into the Communication Needs and Concerns of Asian Students in Speech Communication Performance Classes

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Every year increasing numbers of foreign students, with a wide variety of cultural backgrounds, come to the United States seeking higher education. In 1985-86, for example, there were over 340,000 foreign students enrolled in American institutions of higher learning (Scully).

The variety of foreign students and the diversity of their cultural backgrounds pose unique instructional challenges for teachers as well as the students themselves. Because of language and cultural differences, foreign students often face difficulty in communicating effectively in the American classroom where their native language is not spoken.

The language and cultural differences are often not considered fully by American educators when they instruct and evaluate foreign students. In spite of their differences, foreign students do ask to be treated any differently than their American counterpart. They, however, need the understanding of their instructors to help them to overcome their language and cultural differences. It is important, however, that instructors take into account the language and cultural difference that foreign students bring to class with them in order to provide the most effective instruction possible.

However, in spite of the fact that foreign students have been enrolled in speech communication classes for many

48 *Asian Students in Speech Communication Performance Classes*

years and the fact that their expectations often differ from their instructor's expectation; there has been little investigation into understanding foreign students' needs and concerns within the basic speech communication classroom.

Only a handful of studies, for example, have dealt with the issue of cultural difference, public speaking performance, and the ensuing evaluation problems of culturally different students (Burger, Cooley & Lujan; Philipsen, Scafe & Kontas; Siler & Labadie-Wondergem). Being aware of differences in textual organization or in speech patterns of Native Americans, for example, may lead to a deeper understanding of culturally different students by speech communication instructors. However, despite the usefulness of research into understanding students from other cultures, there is a lack of research investigating foreign students' needs and concerns within the speech communication classroom.

There are a few reasons why the study of foreign students in speech performance classes is a worthwhile task. The first is that public speaking itself provokes anxiety. McCroskey (1977), in a study of nearly 20,000 American students, found that 15-20% were "high communication apprehensives" to the extent that their everyday encounters were impaired and academic functioning was affected. In addition, a nationwide survey of American adults by Bruskin Associates showed that the number one reported fear of American people was speaking before a group (Bruskin Associates).

On the subject of difficulties foreign students faced while studying abroad, Hull states "Clearly, the area where most students perceived difficulties was related to speaking in the classroom" (35). The question this study investigates is what are the needs and concerns of foreign students who take speech communication classes which require public speaking?

METHOD

In this section a description and explanation of the selection of subjects, data collection techniques, and the procedures for collecting the data are discussed.

Subjects

The subjects (N=21) used in this study were all Asian students currently enrolled at a large midwestern university. Asian students were selected because they represent over fifty percent of the foreign student enrollment at the University of Nebraska. The Asian students, therefore, represent the largest group of foreign students and because there are more Asian students enrolled in speech communication classes that require public speaking than any other group of foreign students, they were determined to be the most appropriate for this investigation. Only student from Asian countries ranging from China to the Indonesian archipelago from the north to south and from Pakistan to Tokyo from west to east were considered. In addition, only Asian students whose native language was *not* English, and who have taken or were currently taking a speech communication performance class in which two or more speech presentations were selected to take part in this study.

DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

In order to examine the public speaking experiences of Asian student in speech performance classes, three data-

50 Asian Students in Speech Communication Performance Classes

gathering techniques were used: Participant observation, questionnaire survey, and focus group interviews.

Participant Observation

There are two justifications for using the method of participant observation and they are interrelated. The first is, since interviews or surveys seek information about events that have occurred elsewhere and are described by informants, there could be built-in biases to their accounts such as reactions to certain terms in the interviewer or the survey instrument's working. The second is, there may be psychological barriers to answering questions that occur when discussing matters interviewees are unable or unwilling to talk about (Becker & Geer, 134-37). Thus, direct observation, although not totally free of bias, is recommended. In order to reduce the amount of time and to gain access to a number of Asian students, the survey method was chosen.

Survey

The survey instrument consists of two parts: Part I asks for demographic information and Part II asks Asian students for their perceptions of their speech performance. The results of Part II served as a guide to topic selection for the focus group interviews. The questionnaire was examined by three Asian students for comprehension, linguistic difficulties and potential misunderstandings. All necessary changes were made to ensure that the Asian student would not have any problems responding to the final version of the questionnaire.

***Asian Students in Speech Communication Performance Classes* 51**

In general, the survey has the asset of being more reliable and replicable than some qualitative methods such as participant observation and interviews (Taylor & Bogdan). The survey also has the advantage of being able to obtain large numbers of responses in a relatively short period of time.

In addition, specific demographic information concerning Asian students taking speech performance classes can be relatively quickly and precisely obtained by using the survey method. Lastly, the survey results can be useful indicators of which topics to probe in follow-up focus group interviews. For example, if the average self-rating of effective eye contact was low, the topic of eye contact can be addressed during focus group interviews to further investigate Asian students' feelings on this area of concern.

Focus Group Interviews

Focus group participants used in this study were randomly selected from all those surveyed. Sources vary concerning optimal group size of focus groups, for example Bellenger *et al.* (1979) suggest between eight to twelve people while Wells (1979) recommends between six to ten. In any event, the group size should not be so small as to lose the mutual stimulation that is vital to group interviews nor so large as to be unmanageable (4). However, a smaller group seems to be more feasible because Asian students tend to be more shy than Americans. In addition, language barriers may inhibit them from participating in large groups.

The outline of topics for the focus interviews was partly pre-determined in order to tap the Asian students' public speaking experiences, such as their feelings at the time of speech presentation, while other topics were determined by the questionnaire. Maximum care was given to enabling all

52 Asian Students in Speech Communication Performance Classes

participants to freely share their experiences and to covering all important topics fully.

PROCEDURES

The data collection was carried out in four phases: first, observations were made of Asian students' speeches and the raw data from these observations were analyzed, second, the survey data was collected and analyzed, third, focus group interviews were held and later analyzed, and finally, the three different analyses were synthesized and interpretations made. The following explains the three phases in more detail.

In the first phase, instructors teaching speech performance classes during the fall semester were informally contacted and questioned about the existence of Asian students in their classes. The classes with the largest number of Asian students were chosen for participant observation to assure the maximum number of observations.

Three Asian students, as well as the American students in their classes were observed during speech days in order to find what concerns and needs Asian students seem to be having in presenting speeches. Notes were taken during the observations and later filled in on details immediately following the class. Observation notes represented an attempt to record on paper everything that could possibly be recalled about the observation (Taylor & Bogdan, 53). In order to assure non-reactivity to the observer's presence, the observer arrived in class early on observation days in order to choose a seat that would both afford a good view of the speaker and audience, while ensuring that the observer "blend in" as much as possible.

The raw data collected during participant observations were analyzed for recurrent patterns of behaviors for each

***Asian Students in Speech Communication Performance Classes* 53**

Asian student observed and patterns of similarity between Asian students as well. In addition, notable differences of behaviors were also recorded. If problem areas other than the potential areas covered by each item of Part II of the questionnaire were found, these were added to the survey.

In the second phase of the study, the survey instrument was distributed to all Asian students enrolled in speech performance classes during the fall semester (N=8). The Asian students were then contacted directly in the classrooms either before or after class, after obtaining their consent and setting a time for meeting with them to complete the survey. Due to the anticipated small numbers of Asian students enrolled in speech communication performance classes during a given semester, other Asian students who had taken speech performance classes in the past were located by using the "snowballing" technique in the student union. Snowballing is a technique used for gaining access to potential interviewees through getting to know some informants and having them introduce you to others to participate in the study (Taylor & Bogdan, 83-4).

Pending their consent, all students were asked to complete two questionnaires: a survey questionnaire and an information sheet which was kept for the purposes of contacting students for follow-up information. The information sheet listed their names, phone numbers, and the times they would be available to meet in focus group interviews. The researcher reminded the students that their anonymity would be strictly guarded.

In the third phase, students were divided into two groups of four to six students each according to their available times. They were contacted and asked to attend the focus group interviews. Once they arrived at their assigned meeting time, students were asked to sit in a circular arrangement with the tape recorder placed as unobtrusively as possible. The moderator memorized the topic list and kept the list where its presence would not be obvious, but where it could be

54 *Asian Students in Speech Communication Performance Classes*

quickly reviewed at the end of the interview. Discussions were free-flowing and unstructured except for ensuring that all important topics on the interview guide were covered. The time allotted to group discussions were kept flexible and continued from approximately one to two hours each. The same procedures were followed for the second focus group interview. Tapes of the interviews were analyzed for patterns of similar feelings and thoughts about the speaking experience.

RESULTS

Data were analyzed separately for each data-gathering technique used. The means of responses to each question item in the survey were obtained and the items were rank ordered, i.e., the item with the lowest mean ranking was placed highest in the hierarchy of Asian students needs in speech presentation situations. For focus group interviews, all items in Part II of the questionnaire for which the mean is lower than 2.5, as well as item 11 that asks for students' overall evaluation of effectiveness as a speaker became potential topics of discussion for the focus group interview. In addition, the mean, mode, and distribution for all items are derived and examined for potential topics to also be included in the group interviews, e.g., items with skewed distributions required further inquiry.

Data gathered by using the three approaches were then synthesized by sorting out the similarities and the differences found in each. The analysis was descriptive in nature so as to provide the most indepth understanding of Asian students' communication needs in public speaking situations as possible.

Participant Observation

Foreign students seemed to differ from American students in their general concept of speech presentations, as well as in their physical movements, eye contact, gestures, facial expressions, use of attention-getting strategies, and of course in their fluency in English which manifested itself in their ability to deliver a fluent speech.

The observer's general impression was that the Asian students seemed to have a different image of public speaking itself. They seemed to try to fill the role of a formal speaker who used little humor and got right to the point of what they had to say. For example, they often began their speech in a formal manner (e.g. "I'm here today. . ." or "How to increase. . .").

Overall, Asian students seem to have a different image of the concept of public speaking, resulting in such behaviors as rigid posture, lack of facial expressions, restricted head movements and eye contact, and overall business-like delivery and content. Another conclusion is that not surprisingly, Asian students seemed to have more difficulty in presenting a fluent speech and in making their speech understood because of linguistic deficiencies. The increased attentiveness to Asian students could act as a double-edged sword by either encouraging or intimidating Asian students when presenting speeches.

Survey Questionnaire

Part One of the survey questionnaire tapped demographic information about the subjects of the study. Among the twenty-one Asian respondents, nine males and twelve females participated. Ages ranged from twenty to thirty,

56 *Asian Students in Speech Communication Performance Classes*

with a mean age of 23 years 3 months. As for the respondents' major area of study, the majority of students were business majors. Among the twelve business majors, six were finance, three business administration, one management, one marketing and one accounting. The other nine students' majors were divided as follows: three were in the "hard" science, two in civil engineering and one in food science and technology, two English, two physical education, one was an exchange student majoring in intercultural communication in her country, and one architecture.

Almost half of all the subjects were from Malaysia, making Malaysian students the largest group surveyed. Of the remaining twelve students, Indonesia and Singapore had the next largest groups with three students each. Two Japanese students and one student each from Hong Kong, Laos, Pakistan and Vietnam.

A large discrepancy in Asian students' length of stay in the United States was evident from the range of responses. The shortest stay was two months and the longest was twelve years. The average length of stay was three years four months.

When Asian students were asked what their reason for taking speech class was an overwhelming 86.4% replied that they took speech because it was required while 13.6% elected to take it. This confirms earlier statements by foreign students during the initial study that they took speech only because it was required.

Answers to the question "How many speeches were required?" were not easy to categorize. Despite the fact that they all had initially affirmed that they had given more than one speech in the course prior to being asked to fill out the survey, four of the respondents answered in the questionnaire that they had been asked to give only one speech. The other respondents, however, replied that they were asked to present from two to four speeches. The average was 2.9 and

***Asian Students in Speech Communication Performance Classes* 57**

over half of the 17 students who replied stated that they were required to present three speeches.

The range of the times the student actually took the speech performance class ranged from as early as spring, 1985, to fall of 1988. Most of the students took the speech class during regular semesters, not during summer sessions. Eleven of the twenty-one students took Business and Professional Communication, eight took Fundamentals of Human Communication, and one could not remember the exact course he or she took.

Finally, in answer to the question "What are your career goals?" there was a wide variety of answers. Seven students wanted to be employed in their major area of interest in a future. Four student simply replied that they wished to be "successful." Three students had much more specific career goals, such as becoming a certified public accountant. Three others wished to become teachers. Two simply delineated what they did not want to become in the future and two did not reply at all. For the most part, the surveyed Asian students wished to be successfully employed in business or technical jobs and three wanted to become teachers.

The mean for each response to the questions in Part II asking student to rate their speech presentations on a scale of one to five (one=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree) was above 3.0. Each mean is provided in the brackets at the end of each question. Thus, it may be concluded that according to the questionnaire, Asian students on the average consider all areas as relatively unproblematic. The following is a list of the questions in the order of the most difficult to the least difficult according to the responses provided by the Asian students:

1. generally being an effective speaker (3.0)
2. gestures (3.1)
3. use of transitions (3.19)
4. use of facial expressions (3.24)
5. eye contact (3.33)

58 Asian Students in Speech Communication Performance Classes

6. speech memorization (3.38)
7. proper use of language (3.52)
8. development of main points (3.57)
9. word pronunciations and speech volume (loudness) (3.76)
10. organization (3.81)
11. meeting time requirements (3.95)

The distributions of the majority of the responses to each question were normal and slightly negatively skewed, indicating that most of the responses to the questions were relatively high. Question 4, which asks whether gestures were appropriately used, was investigated further in the focus group interviews because of the bi-modal distribution which showed bipolar responses. Responses to Question 7 were concentrated around agree and strongly agree,, resulting in a mean of 3.95. Apparently, Asian students consider meeting time requirements the least problematic of all areas when presenting speeches.

In conclusion, the survey shows that Asian students' perceptions of their own speech performance are rather favorable. the lowest item response means was 3.0. There may be two main reasons for the optimistic and unanticipated results that conflict somewhat with the results of the participant observation. Participant observation showed that Asian students seemed to have difficulties in use of facial expression, eye contact, overall delivery and appropriate use of language. First, the survey may only be taping shallow responses. Students may be answering the questions superficially, with no way to qualify their responses further than by checking numbers. Secondly, their perceptions about their performance may indeed be quite favorable. They may have an optimistic picture of their speech performance. In addition, although the survey was tested for comprehension before use, many students still had questions on the wording of the such as, "What do you mean by which semester and

year did I take the course?" They may in fact have misunderstood the questions because of linguistic barriers. Another explanation for the unexpectedly high self-ratings is that the initial study interviewed only Malaysian students while this study is looking at Asian students in general, thus resulting in the discrepancy of findings.

Focus Group Interviews

The focus group interviews proved to be the most interesting and revealing part of the study. The interviews took place on two separate days. A seminar room was used to hold the interviews and an audio tape recorder was used to record the interviews. Five students were invited to the first session and four to the second. However, one unexpected student attended the first session, resulting in a group of six participants. During the second session, one student failed to attend, however, another student from the first session returned for the second session making a total of four participants. The Asian students participating in the interview were at ease and eager to contribute their comments. Both sessions were relatively lively with students offering their comments without much probing.

Audio recordings were reviewed after both sessions and transcribed for analysis. Some interesting conclusions could be drawn from the discussions. The results are discussed in the order of the interview outline.

I. Feelings about presenting speeches. In general, Asian students were extremely nervous about their first speaking assignment. Most of them reported staying up till dawn to practice their speech because of anxiety. As one student put it "I get cold hands and cold feet."

There are four main reasons for this anxiety that can be found in Asian students' comments. The first is linguistic

60 *Asian Students in Speech Communication Performance Classes*

in nature. One student admittedly started getting nervous when he had heard American students speak fluently and fast. As a result, he started doubting his ability to meet the same linguistic standards set by his classmates. Later he state "I would like to give [a] speech in my language [for] one hour rather than five minutes in English." Also, since many students felt uneasy about their ability to present a fluent speech in English, they memorized either all or parts of their speech presentation. Memorization, however, did not seem to help decrease anxiety but rather may have even heightened their fear because as in their words, "If you memorize, once you lose a word you panic and stammer."

The Asian students state that they also felt anxious when they did not practice enough and they felt unprepared. This perhaps may suggest that Asian students should be advised to practice adequately until they feel confident about their speech content. Practice alone may not reduce their anxiety completely but it may help.

Finally, a sense of being "totally lost" and feeling "left to give speeches without guidelines" contributed to the anxiety Asian students felt while presenting speeches. Since Asian students are relatively new to the American culture, they are at a loss to understand what is expected of them, thus resulting in anxiety. Thus, it is important for Asian students to ask questions about speaking assignments so that they fully understand what is expected of them.

When asked if students had had any prior speaking experience, all of them answered that they had previously had no similar experience. They may have been asked questions in classes in their own country, but they were asked to present a brief summary of facts or report on a topic pertinent to class discussions. There was no opportunity for development of ideas other than a regurgitation of facts. Some replied however that there were debate clubs in their countries, but that none of the participants of the interview had been members.

Asian Students in Speech Communication Performance Classes 61

In preparation for the speech they had to present in classes, Asian students has two main resources. One was the instructor, who helped Asian students in such areas as organizing ideas into a coherent whole. Another source of support was other international students who helped them in many ways. An interesting discovery was that Asian students had a sort of informal information network where they could find out which international students had already taken the course and then seek guidance from those students on such matters as topic choice, gathering of materials and hints about the exam.

Research for materials did not seem to be a problem for Asian students as they had had previous experience doing research for classes in their own countries. However, after research was done, Asian students spent a lot of time in preparing the delivery of the speech. Many said they stayed up till the early hours of morning practicing in front of roommates, in front of the mirror, or simply writing the speech out and reading it several times. One student stated, "I wanted to impress the audience. I made an extra effort because of the language barrier."

As a result of reading the speech numerous times, the student often ended up memorizing the speech. Others purposefully memorized the whole speech, some memorized the main points in the outline, and yet others memorize the sentences at the top of each of the paragraphs in their speech. The reason for this effort to memorize at least part of the speech arises in their lack of confidence in their English fluency. They state "[My] English is not good enough to speak without preparation."

When asked how they felt when they were using gestures during their speeches, there were mixed reactions. Some Asian students felt that gesturing was a problem to them while others did not remember it to be a problem. In fact, they did not even remember consciously trying to use gestures while presenting their speeches. It could be that the students

62 Asian Students in Speech Communication Performance Classes

who did not feel gesturing to be a problem did not consciously try but only gestured when it felt natural to do so, while the students who found gesturing problematic were overly conscious of their gestures, thus aggravating the problem. This may explain the divergent responses on the question in the survey related to the use of gestures. Gesturing may be a topic the instructor needs to talk to Asian students about when explaining basic guidelines about speech communication.

Asian students' difficulty with English was their greatest concern in presenting speeches in American classrooms. Although, as earlier stated, they found ways to rationalize that fluent English would not be expected of them as of other American students, this thought did not erase the fact that English was still their greatest difficulty in presenting speeches. About this concern, they state "we are asking ourselves, 'do they understand?'" They were worried whether the American audience could understand their accent, tone and pronunciation.

II. Feelings about being in a speech performance class. The focus group interviews also tapped Asian students' perceptions about class in general. Reactions were rather strong concerning the subject of being in speech class. Almost all of the Asian students interviewed emphasized that they only took speech because it was a requirement. Students expressed their reasons for taking speech by saying "you sooner or later have to take it, you might as well get done with it" or "if possible, I don't want to take speech at all." When the two students who had elected to take speech of their own choice were asked why they had chosen to do so, one answered that he was curious and another student had expected it to be relatively easy since she had majored in interpersonal communication in her country. She added that she had been wrong to think so.

In general, however, Asian students had negative feelings about speech class at the beginning of the semester,

***Asian Students in Speech Communication Performance Classes* 63**

which dissipated toward the second half of the semester. One student explained that at first his reaction to the class was "Oh god I hate Thursdays because of speech class," but that now he liked it so much he wanted to take two or three more speech classes in the future. At first he thought that a D grade would be the highest he could hope for in the course, but now he is aiming for an A. He said, "I really love that class, that's all." Generally the feelings of this student seems to be representative of other students. They start the semester feeling "totally lost" and having "cold hands and feet" but later after the first speech or so, many students seem to begin to enjoy the class. Students state "Now I have self confidence. I want to improve" and "After about half a semester, I began to like it."

Asian students generally seemed to prefer small group activities to class discussions. They seemed to be intimidated about having to speak up in class discussions. There were mixed perceptions about participating in smaller groups, though. Some had had bad experiences in small groups where they felt that their opinions were rejected by group members although the instructor made those very same opinions later. They felt that there was a certain stereotyping of Asian students by American students, such as thinking "The [Asian students] are dumb and they don't know what they are talking about." As a result, Asian students tended to keep their opinions to themselves. As one student put it, "I just sit. I really don't want to speak, I really do, but I don't know what to say. . . I think I have a better opinion but I just, oh well, I don't care." Later on, though, as American students got to know the Asian students better, they started to make Asian students feel more accepted in the group. One Asian student said "Now they have seen us over the semesters and they want to know our opinion[s]."

Others had more pleasant experiences in small groups. American students were very encouraging about Asian students' English ability, saying "We're proud of you

64 Asian Students in Speech Communication Performance Classes

because you tried to talk, we're impressed." They even showed interest in the Asian student, asking "how did you learn your English?" In general, however, Asian students seem to have some concerns about being in a small group and the individual group members' abilities to deal with cultural differences seemed to greatly influence Asian students' feelings of acceptance within the group.

Regarding tests and assignments, Asian students all agreed that the tests were difficult because of their lack of vocabulary skills, but that it must be hard for Americans also because their own test results were relatively high compared to American students' test results. Their reactions to assignments were strong. Most Asian students felt that it was unfair that some American students would come to class and be able to do the assignments during class time while they themselves would have to spend at least a couple of hours for the same number of points. They state, "you have to spend two hours for five points. That's stupid."

In general, Asian students' expectations about speech classes were mixed. Some came with positive expectations about learning the skill of presenting speeches and improving their interactions with American students. Others stated having no preconceived ideas about what they were to learn in speech class. However, the positive and neutral expectations about learning in speech class seemed to be overshadowed by the fear of giving speeches. This fear seems to be self-wrought by their own feelings of linguistic and cultural differences and also because of other who incite negative expectations in the students. One Asian student stated that this friend had told him "You don't want to take that class now. Wait till the last semester. . . You'll get about a D. That's alright." Especially since Asian students admitted to looking to international students who had already taken the course for guidance about aspects of the course such as speech and tests, the informal information network or "grapevine"

***Asian Students in Speech Communication Performance Classes* 65**

seems to be a strong influence in establishing expectations in Asian students about speech communication classes.

When asked about instructors' expectations about them as Asian students, they expressed almost unanimously that the instructor seems to have a preconception about Asian students' speeches that results in lower expectations for them. Asian students believe they are evaluated on a different scale than American students because they are foreigners and cannot be as fluent in English as Americans. They say that the instructor expected Asian students not to do well or to be unable to come up with good ideas and that the instructor thinks that because they are foreigners they "cannot get a better grade than Americans." One student states, "In their [instructors'] minds they have already thought we are a foreigner. . . [instructors think] I expected this, so I am just going to give an acceptable." Another student also remarked, "I thought the instructor shouldn't feel that foreigners cannot do as well as Americans." Instead of evaluating them on a "different scale," Asian students stated "They should judge us as they judge everyone else." They are not in fact asking to be judged on the same scale as American students, per se, because their linguistic difficulties would render them at a definite disadvantage when compared to their American counterparts. That is, they would like the instructors to remember that they are not native speakers of English, and to ensure that Asian students are not subtly discriminated against by expecting Asian students to do worse than American students.

III. General comments. On the topic of what advice they would give to foreign students taking speech class for the first time, one stated that he would advise students, especially business majors, to take speech classes as soon as possible without procrastinating. He said that he would give this advice because speech has helped him personally in higher level business classes where presentations are

66 Asian Students in Speech Communication Performance Classes

required. Another said that he believed topic choice was more important for foreign students. Since Asian students could not expect to be able to excel linguistically in a short time, he said that they should seek to speak about a topic that is both interesting and one in which they can feel confident.

Finally, when questioned about the usefulness of information learned in speech classes, they almost all agreed on its usefulness. Their reasons for believing speech class will prove useful in the future are varied. Some believe that speech will help them in other classes where presentations are required. Another student believed that having taken a speech class taught her about American culture, about making informal presentations, and about how Americans like to approach an issue. Another student believed that speech "will help in our future career. . .any career." The general attitude seemed to be that speech class took much time and effort, but that they enjoyed and learned a lot. Only one student among the interviewees did not think it would be helpful to him in his future career. He stated, "If you want to work here [in the United States], stay here, it's great, but I don't have to." He did add however that he believes speech class helped him improve his skills in interaction with other American students. Overall, Asian students seemed to believe that speech class had been beneficial to them in some aspect or other.

DISCUSSION

Asian students were for the most part anxious about their first speech. Their anxiety seems to be related to two factors. First, they are concerned about whether they will be understood by their audience because of their accent, tone, and pronunciation. They also are concerned that if they fail to be able to "think in English" that they may not be able to find

Asian Students in Speech Communication Performance Classes 67

the word or expression they need, thus resulting in "humiliation."

Another source of anxiety for Asian students occurred when they did not understand the assignment fully. For the most part, since American students have been making presentations of various kinds from earlier school years, instructors seem to believe that all their students know the basics of speech presentations. Foreign students, however, may require specific guidelines, for example on what degree of formality is expected, or if a memorized speech is acceptable etc. As one student put it, "We were totally lost."

Anxiety among Asian students lead many of them to memorize their speeches. By memorizing all or parts of their speech, they felt they are compensating for their lack of fluency in English. Lack of sufficient guidelines about what is expected of them when presenting speeches can also lead them to believe they should memorize their speech. When students are not aware that they are not expected to give a manuscript or memorized speech, but rather an informal speech that has more of an appearance of relaxed spontaneity, they may resort to memorization.

Another factor producing anxiety in the Asian student is their lack of cultural knowledge about what is expected of them when presenting speeches. In order to help reduce the anxiety they often turn to other international students who have already experienced a speech performance class to obtain guidelines. Such informal networks of information may cause more harm than good. Informal "grapevine" sources may give the student false expectations of the class, as one student disclosed. He was given an overly negative image of the class and of what grade he could expect to get in class. He found out later that this was unwarranted and he grew to enjoy the class immensely. In addition, the informal sources may give inaccurate information about how to prepare for a speech or a test, and thus put the Asian student seeking guidance in a perilous position. Furthermore, these

68 *Asian Students in Speech Communication Performance Classes*

channels of information could encourage the foreign student to simply plagiarize the speech text or at least parts of it. One student attested that the research for his speech had been done by another student who had already taken the speech class before him. For the above reasons, instructors should encourage foreign students to avoid seeking assistance from "grapevine" sources but rather to come directly to the instructor to discuss any concerns. All of the students who did seek instructor assistance seemed to be more satisfied with the class. The instructor helped them in several ways, for example by giving them pointers on how to help overcome stagefright, how to organize main points, and even by allowing them to practice in their office before the speech day. Routinely asking Asian students to come to the instructor's office at the beginning of the semester when the first speech is assigned may help prevent foreign students' dependence on informal channels of information. If the instructor provides Asian students with sufficiently clear guidelines early enough in the semester, the Asian student should feel less need to use the "grapevine" for information.

It seems that there are three kinds of expectations that may be preventing Asian students from being successful in speech performance classes: (1) their own expectations of speech, (2) instructor expectations of them, and (3) their American classmates' expectations of them as Asian students.

Asian students' expectations of speech has been discussed earlier, so it will be covered in less detail here. The main point is that many students come to speech class with negative expectations about the class. They emphatically express the fact that they did not take the speech class out of choice, but rather because it is a requirement. Part of the cause of their reluctance to take speech classes may be cultural in that speech may not be expected nor valued highly in their own cultures. Another factor may be that informal information channels draw an overly negative picture of

***Asian Students in Speech Communication Performance Classes* 69**

speech class for Asian students taking the class for the first time, thus resulting in negative expectations. It is important that the instructor be aware that most Asian students come to class carrying negative expectations so that instructors will be able to deal with them in a more effective way. For example, instructors may need to use more strategies to motivate Asian students to learn about speech.

The Asian students interviewed felt strongly that instructors had low expectations of them, and that no matter how much they tried or how well they actually did, that they received low grades because they were graded on a different scale. Of course it is impossible to verify this claim, but the important thing is to try to prevent such perceptions by checking one's own expectations and behavior toward Asian students. Asian students should not be evaluated any more leniently than their American counterparts, but instructors should ensure that Asian students lack of fluency in English does not result in low expectations for Asian students resulting in the implementation of different standards. As one student stated, "The [instructors] should judge us as the judge everyone else."

In addition, the instructor should be aware that some Asian students feel that their American classmates also have negative expectations of them, resulting in awkward and unpleasant experiences in small groups. Many Asian students felt as if their comments were not valued in small groups because they were later the very same comments that the instructor made. All of them felt that as the semester progressed, and as the American students realized that there was no basis for this stereotype, that small groups went more smoothly. The instructor may help by monitoring the small group discussions more closely and taking such necessary corrective action as asking for and acknowledging Asian students' comments.

70 Asian Students in Speech Communication Performance Classes

SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR SPEECH INSTRUCTORS

Given the results of this study, several suggestions can be made for instructors with Asian students in their speech performance classes:

1. Be aware that Asian students may come to speech class with limited cultural knowledge about how to present a speech.
2. Be aware that the grapevine is a source that many Asian students depend on to compensate for a lack of knowledge about speech classes and speaking assignments. Other students may incite negative expectations about speech class, or make their speeches available, thus possibly leading to plagiarism.
3. Try to set up a meeting with Asian students early in the semester. At this meeting provide Asian students with additional information about speech presentations that were not necessary for American students, possible by providing a tape of model student speeches. Also try to establish good rapport with Asian students during these meetings. Simply asking them to refer to you if they have any questions may prevent Asian students from depending on informal sources of information.
4. Try to give Asian students honest yet encouraging feedback. Positive feedback is all the more necessary when dealing with Asian students who need to feel reassured that their speech has been understood. Feedback from fellow classmates also may help build confidence in Asian students.

***Asian Students in Speech Communication Performance Classes* 71**

- 5. Try not to make Asian student feel as if they are being singled out to speak during class discussions. They may not feel comfortable speaking up in large groups because of their language difficulties or because of cultural reasons.**
- 6. Monitor small group discussions closely and ensure that all members' comments are being respected. Casually asking for and commenting on Asian students' ideas in small groups may make them feel more comfortable.**
- 7. Finally, take a minute to ask whether you are being fair when evaluating Asian students' speeches. Are you unconsciously giving them a low evaluation because of their limited mastery of English? Or on the other hand, are you overcompensating for their linguistic deficiencies?**

The experience of taking speech class proved valuable for almost all of the Asian students interviewed. For the most part, they viewed speech as useful preparation for other courses that require oral presentations, and in general for their careers, be it in their country or in the United States. However, we may be able to make the overall speech experience a more pleasant and effective one for all involved, the Asian students, their American classmates, and the instructor by being aware of Asian students' concerns and needs. This may be the necessary first step to making the speech class a place where all cultural differences are acknowledged and understood.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This study investigated the needs and concerns of Asian students in public speaking classes. Due to the lack of existing literature on the stated topic, the study was mainly descriptive in nature. Several guidelines to future instructors of Asian students in speech performance classes were offered based on analysis of the descriptive data. Although this study may lend some initial insights into the needs and concerns of Asian students in speech performance classes, more research into this and other related topics is needed.

First of all, since this study seems to be the first examining the needs and concerns of Asian students in speech performance classes, replications of this study will be necessary to support or refute the findings. In addition, studies testing and extending the findings will also be valuable. For example, one of the findings was that students had little cultural knowledge of what was expected of them in terms of public speaking. A study where the speech evaluations of an experimental group that is presented with a lecture on the basics of public speaking in addition to class lectures, in compared to the evaluations of a control group without the additional lecture could either support or disprove this study's finding. Another example is a study where instructors of the students in an experimental group would be requested to assure the Asian students that their speech evaluations will not be biased against them because of their limited mastery of English. The mean of their speech evaluations could be compared against the speech evaluations of a control group that did not have this assurance. Studies of this type may shed some additional insight into the needs and concerns of Asian students in speech performance classes. In addition, more ambitious studies investigating foreign students as a whole could also provide a greater

understanding of foreign students' needs and concerns in speech performances classes.

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***Asian Students in Speech Communication Performance Classes* 75**

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