

**Investigation into speech performances of
Hong Kong ESL learners at tertiary education level**

Pang Yin Chong

(Supervisor: Prof. Jette Hansen Edwards)

Abstract

This capstone project aims to examine the speech performance of Hong Kong ESL learners at tertiary education level. Speaking, in addition to being an essential and basic method for people to communicate thoughts and ideas, is one of the most significant instruments that influences one's impression to others. One is not only judged by what one's speech has delivered, but also, even more importantly, how it is delivered. One of the most essential aims of this capstone research is to identify how prepared speech, which is typically assumed to be more well-delivered, is different from impromptu speech produced by Hong Kong ESL learners, and thus pinpoint the crucial criteria and factors that influence accuracy and fluency in speech production. In the case of short preparation, speech performances appeared to be similar to that of impromptu speeches in terms of assessment criteria of accuracy, e.g. grammaticality; however, concerning fluency, a short preparation time clearly contributed to better performance, e.g. lower percentage of dysfluencies (e.g. false start, stutter...), use of broader variety of cohesive devices etc. Based on the results and other factors, such as language education background, that affect Hong Kong students' speech performance, it is plausible to devise strategies to enhance learners' impromptu speech performances, or their speaking abilities, by focusing on the differences that preparation prompts. Furthermore, the research could also shed light on some disadvantages of Hong Kong language education, as revealed by the participants, which, if addressed, could benefit the English-as-a-second-language (ESL) development of our future generation.

Reflection

Answering the clichéd question of “what have you learnt during all those years at university” could be a tough challenge for numerous graduates. Fortunately for me, this capstone project would be the best illustration of linguistic knowledge I have acquired throughout a variety of major coursework and, more importantly, my ability to apply the broad range of theories, models and skills to a practical context. Speaking has always been the language skill which I consider most significant as it is directly relevant to one’s abilities to communicate and impression to others. Thus, a study that closely inspect the processes of and factors influencing speech production largely intrigued me and enabled me to complete the project passionately. I would love to express my gratitude to all professors at the department, especially my supervisor, Prof. Hansen-Edwards, for all the solid advice and guidance for me to establish a well-founded paper.