CHINESE LECTURERS' PERCEPTIONS, PROBLEMS AND STRATEGIES IN LECTURING IN ENGLISH TO CHINESE-SPEAKING STUDENTS

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Abstract

This paper reports on the third stage of a longitudinal study into lecturing in English to non-English speaking students conducted at a university in Hong Kong. The first stage of this project (Flowerdew and Miller, 1992) focussed on the perceptions, problems and strategies of non-native speaking students receiving lectures in English from native-speaking lecturers. In the second stage of the project (Flowerdew and Miller, 1996a) the lecture situation was considered from the other side of the lecture equation, that of the lecturers. In the third stage of the project, which is reported here, the ESL lecture is again investigated from the lecturer's point of view, but this time the focus is not on expatriate native-speaking lecturers, but on local Chinese lecturers who share the L1 of their students and for whom English is also therefore a second language. After presenting the findings of this third stage of the project, the results of the three studies are compared and contrasted. Finally, the implications of the three studies when viewed collectively are considered and recommendations made for each of the three groups of subjects: NNS students, NS lecturers and NNS lecturers.

Introduction

While there is a considerable body of research into lecturing which dates back to at least the beginning of the century (see Brown, 1987, for review), little of this research has focused on situations where lecturing is conducted in a second language (Flowerdew, 1994). Since the collections of research papers devoted to this topic edited by Flowerdew (1994), however, this situation seems to be improving, with publications reporting on experimental research (e.g. Berne, 1995; Jensen and Hansen, 1995; Thompson and Rubin, 1996; Zhao, 1997) and practical research-based pedagogical advice (e.g. Mendelsohn and Rubin, 1995; Rubin, 1995; Raphan, 1996; Rand, 1997) increasing in particular (see also Celce-Murcia [1995] on discourse analysis and listening; Ferris and Tagg, [1996] on listening needs analysis; and Vogely, 1998 on anxiety in
listening). In addition, a number of research dissertations have been recently completed on academic listening (e.g. Chinokul, 1995; Thompson, 1997; McKnight, 1998).

As more and more countries where English is a second language adopt English as the medium of tertiary level instruction, it is becoming increasingly important that research should be directed at lecturing in situations where English is the second language. What are lecturers’ and students’ attitudes towards giving and receiving lectures in a second language? What are the problems encountered by lecturers and students in this endeavour? What strategies are used by lecturers and students to optimise the effectiveness of second language lectures? These are some of the important basic questions that research should begin to address, so that the findings can be used as a basis for lecturer and student preparation for second language lectures.

In two earlier studies published in RELC Journal (Flowerdew and Miller, 1992, 1996a) two of the present researchers have made a start in researching this area, one paper (Flowerdew and Miller, 1992) focused on students’ perceptions, problems and strategies in listening to lectures in English at a university in Hong Kong, and another (Flowerdew and Miller, 1996a) studied the perceptions, problems and strategies of expatriate, native English-speaking (NS) lecturers teaching Chinese L1 students at this same university (see also Flowerdew and Miller, 1995, 1996b and Flowerdew, Li and Miller, 1996, 1998 for other related research). This article takes the research a stage further. It again considers the perceptions, problems and strategies of lecturers. However, this time the lecturers who are the focus of the study are not NSs, but are non-native-speaking (NNS) lecturers who nevertheless are required to lecture in English. In our case the lecturers who are the focus of the study are Cantonese L1 speakers. Given that in many parts of the world English medium instruction at the university level is conducted by non-native speakers of English we would claim that the relevance of our study goes beyond the context of Hong Kong.

A particularly distinctive feature of the Chinese-speaking lecturers’ perceptions, problems and strategies as compared to their native-speaking counterparts, our investigation showed, was the possibility of them using Cantonese while lecturing. This feature has been singled out for special consideration and is reported on by us elsewhere (Flowerdew, Li and Miller, 1998). In summary, these Cantonese-speaking lecturers supported the official English-medium of instruction policy in principle, on the grounds that English provided access to greater knowledge, was the language of the disciplines,
and was important for professional careers and for maintaining Hong Kong's international status. This attitude was to a considerable extent in conflict with their own stated practice in lecturing, however, where they were faced with the difficulties of teaching students many of whom they considered to have inadequate levels of competence in English, who showed a certain amount of resistance to English, and with whom they wanted to establish ethnic solidarity through the use of the common mother tongue.

As we have gone into this question of the use of the mother tongue in English medium lectures elsewhere, as just mentioned, in this paper we report on other salient features of the Chinese-speaking lecturers' perceptions, problems and strategies.

Methodology

The data reported on in this paper comes mostly from 15 in-depth lecturer interviews. However, these formed part of a larger data collection procedure which included Lecturer Questionnaire; Student Questionnaire; Lecture Observation; Follow-up contact in the form of face-to-face interview or telephone conversation (see Flowerdew, Li and Miller, 1996, 1998 for details). The approach is a “grounded” one in that no pre-existing theories were imposed upon the data, but rather the concepts and local “theory” were allowed to develop out of the data (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Interview

Thirty-four Chinese lecturers at City University (thereafter City U) were approached to take part in the study of whom 27 agreed. For the purposes of this report the data from 15 lecturers B selected to provide a cross-section in terms of discipline, age, experience, and gender B is used.

The interview followed a semi-structured format similar to that used in the previous studies by Flowerdew and Miller (1992, 1996a). That is, three main topic areas were determined beforehand. These were Perceptions, Problems, and Strategies in lecturing. These areas were generated from student interviews conducted in the earlier Flowerdew and Miller (1992) study. Lecturers were asked both general and specific questions within each area. They were allowed to answer in whichever way they wished and were encouraged to elaborate their answers if they wished and/or the interviewer wanted to pursue a particular line of questioning. All interviews were recorded...
on cassette tape. Depending on whether the interview had been conducted in Cantonese or English, a research assistant then translated and/or transcribed it. This work was supervised by the Cantonese-speaking researcher. Transcribed/translated transcripts of the interviews were provided to the interviewees to check for accuracy. All data was treated in confidence and is reported anonymously.

After the interviews had been translated and/or transcribed, they were analysed by the three researchers. Meetings were held to discuss the analysis and decisions were made on coding the data into categories which were felt to be potentially significant. The interviews were then edited and loaded onto a special word-processor program which aids in organising qualitative data. The program used was QSR Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorising (NUD.IST) (Quality Solutions and Research Pty., 1994). The program is designed primarily as a search and retrieval system for handling large amounts of qualitative data. After the data has been recorded and coded, it is loaded onto the system. The program then allows the researcher, by way of the code-and-retrieve capabilities, to build matrices and develop theories based on the data. The NUD.IST program thus allowed the researchers to efficiently organise the large amount of interview data and helped develop the analysis further. From this, significant comments made by the lecturers were identified and cross-referenced with other interviews so that a picture of the key perceptions, problems and strategies of the lecturers vis-a-vis the lecture event emerged.

The Lecturers

The academic staff at CityU is made up of approximately 75% local Cantonese speakers, with English as their second language, and 25% English-speaking expatriates. Table 1 provides background information on the 15 lecturers reported on in this study. As can be seen from the table, both humanities and science lecturers are included in the study. Most of the lecturers hold Lecturer level posts, with three at Senior Lecturer and one at Assistant Lecturer level. There is a wide range of teaching experience among the lecturers: from 1 to 30 years. Many of the lecturers gained their lecturing experience solely in Hong Kong, teaching Cantonese-speaking students. However, a third of the lecturers have had some experience in lecturing to non-Hong Kong Chinese students, and this experience was gained in English-speaking countries, the UK, USA and Canada. Most of the lecturers, if they have not taught overseas, have pursued their postgraduate study there. Of the 15 lecturers reported on
here the smallest size of student group lectured to was 24, in a postgraduate course in the department of Building and Construction. The largest group lectured to was 120 students, in a Business and Management department undergraduate course. On average, the lecturers involved in the study lectured to groups of between 40 and 90 students. The average group size was 70. Those lecturers choosing to be interviewed in Cantonese are indicated by an asterisk in the table and throughout the report. The purpose of including lecturers from different subject areas is to portray a global view of the lecturing at CityU. For a detailed analysis of lecturing in one subject [Economics], see Flowerdew and Miller (1997).

**Table 1 Background Information on the Lecturers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Lecturing experience (years)</th>
<th>Lecturing experience in HK</th>
<th>Lecturing experience outside HK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>Business Management</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>2½</td>
<td>2½</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LB</td>
<td>Building &amp; Construction</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LC</td>
<td>Business Management</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>Law</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2yrs UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LE</td>
<td>Economics &amp; Finance</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2yrs Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LF</td>
<td>Information Science</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4yrs UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LG*</td>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LH*</td>
<td>Chinese Translation</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21yrs China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LI*</td>
<td>Social Science</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1yr USA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

120
Perceptions

In this section of the report we describe the Chinese-speaking lecturers’ perceptions of key features of lecturing to Chinese-speaking students. In our previous papers of students’ and native-English-speaking lecturers’ perceptions, problems and strategies (Flowerdew and Miller 1992, 1996a), we illustrated the comments with many direct quotations. In this paper, because of space limitations and because of the extent of the discussion, while we do use direct citations, these are fewer and instead we mostly summarise the main points made by the Chinese lecturers in the interviews.

Attitudes towards Lectures and Lecturing at City University

In reply to the interview question “Do you enjoy lecturing to CityU students?” all the lecturers said that they enjoyed the experience, but with varying degrees of satisfaction. Some of the reasons offered as to why they enjoyed it were the students’ attitude to learning, and a sense of personal satisfaction. When asked how important lectures were compared to other aspects of teaching such as tutorials, laboratory work, etc. most of the lecturers stated that lectures were the most important. The following comment by LC was typical in highlighting the central role of the lecture:

LC: Lecture I think is the basic, the tie or the link between the body of knowledge and the students.
Perceived Purpose of the Lectures

In answer to the interview question, “What is important to get over for you in a lecture - the basic facts or points of view?”, there was a difference of opinion between the lecturers. Many lecturers answered that both were important. A few lecturers pointed out that because of the nature of their subject matter it was more important to get the basic facts across to the students. But several considered the main value of giving lectures was to put over the lecturer’s point of view on the subject.

LE: Well, I think for most subjects they always need some points of views to look at the facts. So I think both are important.

English Language Policy

All the lecturers interviewed were aware that the official policy at CityU was that English be used as the medium of instruction in lectures. They were also aware that the policy contained a certain degree of flexibility and that some Chinese might also be used. Most lecturers were in favour of the policy and the flexible ways in which it can be interpreted.

LC: [Do you know the policy?] Yes, it’s English… I don’t have a problem… But I feel that by using a couple of sentences in Cantonese will make students feel more comfortable… and I have to use it to make them at ease.

LA: When … I really want them to understand certain points, because they thought they really cannot catch what is the fact and what is said, then we can revert to a little bit of Cantonese.

Structuring of Lectures

The lecturers were divided as to the usefulness of following a rigid outline, or plan, in their lectures. Around half the respondents said that they did follow a rigid outline, with the other half saying that they did not. For those who followed a rigid outline some reasons given were that it helps the lecturer define his/her course of lectures, and that it is good for the students, especially weak students, to be able to follow what is going on. Several lecturers also pointed out that the courses they taught were pre-determined by others and that they had to teach to the syllabus.
Our course contents are pre-determined by course documents. It’s not up to lecturers in determining what to teach, instead, they only execute what has been laid down in the course syllabus determined by predecessors.

Of the lecturers who said that they did not follow a rigid outline the main reasons for this were that it was necessary to be able to judge what is important and make adjustments as they progress through their course of lectures, and that outlines were often prepared by other members of staff and it was difficult to keep to them. Furthermore, in some disciplines, such as engineering, the syllabus could very soon become outdated.

**Lecture Content and Real World Experience**

The concept of real world experience brought into the lecture by either the lecturer or the students was mentioned by many of the respondents. This idea was mentioned in relation to their own style of lecturing and the usefulness of relating practical issues in the lecture to society at large.

LD: I don’t believe in just sitting down and spouting on mathematics and physics without any direct relevance to society and theory.

**Lecturing Style**

Most lecturers described their style of lecturing as what is referred to in the literature as “chalk and talk”, that is, they expound the material with the support of a white board and/or overhead projector as visual aids. Reasons for preferring this style were that the students expected it; and, it was the ‘best’ method with large groups. A few lecturers did say that they adopted a more interactive style of lecturing and that the results were favourable. These lecturers, however, mentioned that an interactive style was usually only possible with mature students (part-time evening courses) or with small lecture groups.

LD: The students have an attitude, they think that a lecture should be just one-way textbook patterns exercise to enable them to learn all by heart, and tutorials should be a [lecture in] miniature, to elaborate all that was said in lectures.
Lecture Materials

Several lecturers brought up the topic of textbooks in relation to their lectures. Many of them seemed to use a textbook as a source of reference throughout their series of lectures. One important function of the lectures was to help students get to grips with their textbook. However, it was not always possible to find suitable local textbooks and so lecturers often relied on imported textbooks: a situation which they were not always happy with because of the cultural difficulty for students in using foreign textbooks.

LH*: I won’t just choose a textbook written by, say, an American ... I deem it a really bad thing to do... because the purpose for which the textbook is written, the students, the cultural background, the range and nature of the problems to be tackled are all different from ours.

Lecturers’ Own Experiences As Students

The perceptions of a number of lecturers concerning lecturing at CityU were coloured by their own experiences as students. These lecturers’ comments covered a range of areas:

• they felt that they were able to understand how the students feel about being lectured to in English by a Chinese person;

• they could relate to the usefulness of handouts in lectures for L2 students;

• they knew that they have to check understanding and not simply rely on the students being able to understand everything;

• they were sensitive to many of the linguistic problems their students had;

• they were aware of the constraints on students of asking questions in class.

Problems

In this section of the report we describe the problems the lecturers reported encountering in lecturing to CityU students.
Students’ Weaknesses in English

The majority of lecturers commented on their students’ poor levels of English, which increases their difficulty in lecturing. In nearly all the interviews conducted the students’ standard of English was mentioned as one of the main problems in giving lectures.

LL*: It [the standard of English] becomes worse and worse year by year.

Pressure to Use Cantonese

Because of the perceived poor level of English by mostly first-year students, many of the lecturers claimed that these students often put pressure on them to use Cantonese in the lectures.

LM: They ask me why don’t I teach in Chinese … I believe that as many as half the class would prefer using Cantonese as the medium of instruction if there’s such a choice for them.

Students’ Unwillingness to Participate and Ask Questions

Related to the issue of students’ use of English is the extent to which students participate in lectures by asking questions. The predominant response to ‘Do your students ask questions in a lecture?’ was, ‘No, they don’t’. A number of reasons were given for this:

- difficulty for the students to use English in general;
- students do not know what constitutes a good question;
- a desire by the students not to be embarrassed in front of their peers if they ask a question;
- students’ questions may be perceived as unnecessary interruptions to the lecture;
- students do not understand the concepts, so they are not able to formulate any questions;
- students have passive learning styles inherited from the secondary school system.
While several lecturers mentioned that they were actively trying to encourage more participation in their lectures from the students, the feeling is that this can only be done gradually, over a period of time.

**Negative Influence of the School System on Learning Style**

Several lecturers accounted for their students’ behaviour in lectures in terms of their experiences as secondary school students and their lack of preparation before coming to university. An important feature of the learning style which students carried over from secondary school was a propensity for rote learning. This approach was traced back by one lecturer to the Confucianist heritage of Hong Kong students.

LD: That’s the problem because the attitude of Hong Kong students is that they’re not required to think but they’re required to memorise and spell it out at the exam and that is endemic to the Chinese culture all the way back to the time of Confucianist exams. Learning by heart was always viewed as the good thing to do.

**Note-taking**

One important difference in the requirements of school and university is the need to take notes. Several lecturers reported that note-taking is not necessary at schools in Hong Kong because much of the learning is by rote memorisation.

There were a variety of comments and opinions regarding students’ note-taking skills in lectures. Many of the respondents reported that they neither encouraged nor discouraged their students from taking notes. Several lecturers, however, did encourage their students to take notes citing this skill as essential to the university experience of being a student. However, they were also aware of how difficult this was for their students.

LA: I think they have little knowledge about note-taking.

LF: I made my own observation because I found that it was hard for them to listen and write at the same time on their second language background. And I saw that the notes they
wrote down were not very complete. So I thought it would be easier if I provide them with the outlines and some notes and they can just jot down the important points.

Strategies

In this section we report on strategies adopted by Chinese-speaking lecturers to adapt to the second language lecturing situation.

Adjusting Language

When asked whether they adjusted their language to take account of their students' limited English proficiency, most lecturers said they made certain modifications to their language. The various strategies that lecturers use were all directed at making their delivery simpler for the students to understand. One common simplification strategy was to slow down the rate of delivery. A slower delivery was not without its problems, however. For one thing it may be boring for more proficient students. Another problem with the slower delivery was that less material could be covered.

LF: Although I did try to speak as slowly as I could, I still got feedback from students that I was speaking too fast. But I think we have wanted to strike a balance between how fast to speak and deliver the things, because otherwise it would be very boring for those that can absorb what you’re saying.

LK*: For example, of the same coverage, I did once use both Cantonese and English to explain, and less time is used in the former case.

A number of lecturers mentioned simplifying their sentence structures, as a means of making their delivery more comprehensible to their students. This in conjunction with restricting their choice of vocabulary and repeating more made up the majority of linguistic strategies lecturers used to help their students in lectures.

LD: I make my terms simple ... I try to stay away from huge jargonistic type phrases and make it a simple paraphrase of everything in the textbook to make it as simple as possible.
There is anecdotal evidence that some lecturers use Cantonese because it is easier for them than to use English, which is for them a second language. However, none of the lecturers in our study reported this to be the case. Some said that they used Cantonese to get their point across better and to save time. But this does not amount to the same thing as using Cantonese because they had difficulty with English.

Providing Handouts

We referred earlier to the problems students had in note-taking. One strategy used by lecturers for overcoming this problem was to give students prepared notes in the form of handouts. The majority of lecturers said that they prepared lecture outlines to give to their students. They offered a number of reasons as to why they did this, among them that:

- it allows the students to concentrate more on what the lecturer is saying instead of trying to make notes;
- the lecturer can be sure that students at least have a record of the important facts of the lecture;
- they serve the student for revision purposes;
- because the lecturer does not like to use a textbook;
- it serves to remind students of important chapters and pages to read from the prescribed text;
- it is the department’s policy to provide handouts;
- it helps lecturers to rationalise lecturing in English to the students.

Providing Plenty of Examples

A number of lecturers emphasised the importance of giving plenty of examples in their lecturing. One important function of examples was to illustrate important concepts and their applications. This is especially important when lecturers can use local examples. The ability to illustrate concepts through the use of local examples was an advantage some lecturers felt they have over their expatriate colleagues.
I perceive that there might have a little problem for foreign new-comers, of which if they fail to adapt theories to the Hong Kong business environments, like giving examples, students might have difficulties in absorbing those theories.

Another important function of examples was to allow lecturers to go beyond the textbook and relate the concepts to real life. This is especially important, given that many of the textbooks are foreign to Hong Kong.

LE: Lectures would not always be the same as the textbooks. So I add more examples or some facts about Hong Kong — [referring to Economic textbooks] most of them were written in the U.S. context, so we would put in more Hong Kong-related context to the module content.

Use of Cantonese

The use of Cantonese was probably the most significant strategy used by lecturers to compensate for students’ weak English. There was considerable variation in the degree to which lecturers reported making use of the mother tongue. However, none of the lecturers interviewed said that they never used Cantonese (see Flowerdew, Li and Miller, 1998 for more on this).

Summary of the Studies into Lecturing in English

In this section we will compare the findings from our three RELC Journal studies into lecturing in English to NNS students. The information in Table 2 comes from the three studies. The students’ findings can be found in Flowerdew and Miller (1992). The NS lecturers’ study is reported by Flowerdew and Miller (1996a). The Chinese-speaking lecturers’ findings are reported in this paper.

As can be seen from Table 2, there was a fair amount of overlap in the students’ and lecturers’ perceptions, problems and strategies about the lecture event. However, there were also some striking differences.
Table 2 Comparison of the three studies into lecturing in English to non-native English-speaking students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Native-English Speaking Lecturers</th>
<th>Chinese Lecturers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. No previous experience of listening to lecturers prior to university</td>
<td>1. Enjoyed lecturing to Chinese students</td>
<td>1. Enjoyed lecturing to Chinese students</td>
<td>1. Enjoyed lecturing to Chinese students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Unsure about the purpose of the lecture: provide facts or give opinions?</td>
<td>2. Considered lectures very important to academic life</td>
<td>2. Considered lectures very important to academic life</td>
<td>2. Considered lectures very important to academic life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Considered their overall comprehension of lectures fairly good</td>
<td>3. Inconsistency about the purpose of lectures: some think it is important to give basic facts, others think it more important to give opinions</td>
<td>3. Inconsistency about the purpose of lectures: some think it is important to give basic facts, others think it more important to give opinions</td>
<td>3. Inconsistency about the purpose of lectures: some think it is important to give basic facts, others think it more important to give opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Able to identify strategies lecturers used which made comprehension easier:</td>
<td>4. Need to use chalk-and-talk style of lecturing as this is what students were used to</td>
<td>4. Need to use chalk-and-talk style of lecturing as this is what students were used to</td>
<td>4. Need to use chalk-and-talk style of lecturing as this is what students were used to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Systematic presentation of information</td>
<td>5. Singled out language as main problems for students in lectures. Considered students weak in:</td>
<td>5. Singled out language as main problems for students in lectures. Considered students weak in:</td>
<td>5. Singled out language as main problems for students in lectures. Considered students weak in:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Summarising lecture points</td>
<td>- Following fast speech</td>
<td>- Following fast speech</td>
<td>- Following fast speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lecturer's responses to students' questions</td>
<td>- Poor general vocabulary and specialist terminology</td>
<td>- Poor general vocabulary and specialist terminology</td>
<td>- Poor general vocabulary and specialist terminology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lecturer initiating interaction with students during the lecture</td>
<td>- Poor in basic concepts about discipline</td>
<td>- Poor in basic concepts about discipline</td>
<td>- Poor in basic concepts about discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Repetition of main points</td>
<td>- Passive learners</td>
<td>- Passive learners</td>
<td>- Passive learners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Lecturers relate to their students from the point of view of their own experiences as students learning in a second language
- Lecturers felt the need to rationalize their lecturing in English to their students: textbooks in English, exams in English, policy of the university.
### Problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Native-English Speaking Lecturers</th>
<th>Chinese Lecturers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. speed of delivery</td>
<td>1. speed of delivery</td>
<td>1. Students’ weaknesses in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. new terminology and concepts</td>
<td>2. vocabulary and specialist terminology</td>
<td>2. Pressure on lecturer to use Cantonese in the lecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. difficulty in concentrating</td>
<td>3. constraining effects of students’ learning style results in inability to achieve a participatory style of lecturing</td>
<td>3. Unable to achieve a participatory style of lecturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. cultural problems (e.g. sensitive to cross-cultural misunderstanding, difficulty in using humour)</td>
<td>4. Negative influence of school system on students’ learning styles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. attendance, lateness and indiscipline</td>
<td>5. Students’ inability to take notes in the lecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Students’ inability to take notes in the lecture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Native-English Speaking Lecturers</th>
<th>Chinese Lecturers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. read prior to the lecture or afterwards from a prescribed text</td>
<td>1. use visual aids and handouts</td>
<td>1. adjust language to suit students’ proficiency level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. ask their peers for help</td>
<td>2. modify language</td>
<td>2. provide handouts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ask for clarification from the lecturer or in follow-up tutorials</td>
<td>3. use examples</td>
<td>3. give plenty of local examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. try to concentrate harder</td>
<td>4. obtain verbal and non-verbal feedback from the audience</td>
<td>4. use Cantonese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. mark relevant points in the handout or prescribed text</td>
<td>5. empathise with the students’ situation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perceptions

Although all of the lecturers who took part in our studies reported that they enjoyed lecturing and that they considered the lecture to be the most important conduit for passing on knowledge to students, very few of the students reported having any experiences of attending lectures prior to coming to university and as such were probably not aware of the importance attached to lectures by their lecturers. In addition to this, all parties seemed to be unsure about the main purpose of the lecture. In some cases lecturers used their lectures to go over the basic facts of the topic, in others they gave their opinions. With such variety, and no ground rules, it was not surprising that students were unsure of how they should react in lectures.

Most of the students we interviewed considered their listening comprehension skills fairly good. However, their performance in listening tests did not attest to this (see Flowerdew and Miller 1992) and most of the lecturers felt that it was the students’ linguistic skills which prevented them from benefiting from the lectures.

Both NS and NNS lecturers predominantly used a talk-and-chalk style of lecture presentation. They commented that this was what students expected and both groups talked about how the school system in Hong Kong encouraged passive learning approaches by the students. The Chinese-speaking lecturers, though, were much more vocal in their disapproval of this style of learning.

Although both groups of lecturers empathised with their students’ predicament, the Chinese-speaking lecturers were able to empathise more and although they all agreed in having an English-medium policy at the university, they stated that they would like to apply the policy flexibly so as to accommodate their students’ learning difficulties.

Problems

The main problems during lectures, as stated by all three groups, were the linguistic skills of the students. Speed of delivery and the inability to understand vocabulary or specialist terminology were the main problems.

Chinese-speaking lecturers reported having more problems due to the linguistic skills of the students during lectures than the native-English-
speaking lecturers mentioned. Surprisingly, these problems seemed to stem from the Chinese-speaking lecturers’ ability to use Cantonese. Many lecturers reported student pressure to use Cantonese during the lectures. This was exacerbated by the students’ unwillingness to ask questions during the lecture when they were having problems, and their inability to take notes in English. Because of their insider knowledge of the school system in Hong Kong the Chinese-speaking lecturers tended to attribute the students’ weak study skills to the system of education they had experienced at school.

**Strategies**

Each of the three groups had strategies they employed to assist them in giving or following lectures. Students tended to make extensive use of their peer groups for support in understanding what was taking place in the lecture. They also made use of their reading skills either prior to the lecture or afterwards to enhance their comprehension of the topic. All the lecturers made attempts to modify their language when lecturing to their students. They also gave more handouts than they would like to give, tried to use local examples as much as possible, and tried to empathise with their students’ situation of receiving lectures in English. In addition to this, NS lecturers used more visual aids than they were used to and relied on audience feedback: verbal or non-verbal, to make sure that the students were following the lecture. In spite of the fact that many Chinese-speaking lecturers complained about the pressure their students exerted on them to use Cantonese during the lecture, this was also considered an advantage they had over the non-Cantonese-speaking lecturers, and was sometimes used to aid comprehension or to check students’ understanding.

**Conclusion**

One of the main benefits of carrying out longitudinal research such as that reported on here is the ability of the researchers to constantly validate the perceptions of the respondents with other parties concerned. This triangulation of the data leads to a greater understanding of the processes and procedures involved. In the previous papers in this study (Flowerdew and Miller 1992, 1996a) we made suggestions for lecturers and students. In general these suggestions focussed on better preparation for students in pre-sessional language courses before attending lectures and that greater attention be given to lecturer training.
This third study into Chinese lecturers’ perceptions, problems and strategies strengthens the points we made in the earlier papers. It also highlights some other considerations.

Firstly, the Chinese lecturers wanted to maintain the English-medium policy at the university but they also wanted to apply the policy ‘flexibly’. This flexibility may be confusing for students if it is applied on an ad hoc basis. Some students may expect more English, while others may want English to be supplemented by Cantonese. It is therefore important for the university and/or academic departments to have a clear policy on the use of the two languages. Perhaps certain courses can be designated as “English only”, with others allowing code-mixing (cf. Li 1999). Lecturers can then use the policy to guide them when preparing for lectures and they can refer to the policy whenever they feel pressure from the students to use one or other language. From the students’ point of view, under the credit unit system, they will have greater freedom to select courses that use the pattern of language which suits them best.

Secondly, local lecturers are very sensitive to their students’ previous secondary school learning styles and may well have had similar learning experiences themselves. Although they may not condone continuing to use such learning styles at university, they may be in a better position to introduce the students to ‘new’ ways of learning. If this is the case, then there is an argument for having local lecturers deliver lectures to first year students and only later, when the students are more familiar with the lecture event, have foreign lecturers. On the other hand, one might equally argue that a “deep-end” strategy of exposing students to expatriate lecturers is likely to be most effective in bringing about change in the students’ learning habits. Perhaps a middle course, with some lectures delivered by locals and others by expatriates, is the way to go.

From the students’ and lecturers’ data we are able to offer several suggestions on how both parties may improve their involvement with the lecture event.

Advice to Students

- Lectures are usually more than just a one-way transfer of knowledge. Most lecturers would welcome some interaction in a lecture especially if there is something you do not understand.
• Lectures are non-standard, that is, the way one lecturer presents material may be very different from how another lecturer presents the same material. Try to find out what style the lecturer uses and be aware of how the lecturer is trying to help the audience with both verbal and non-verbal cues.

• Make use of other activities to enhance comprehension skills. One skill which is especially important is pre-reading of lecture handouts.

• During a lecture do not rely entirely on the handout. Try to make some simple notes and compare these with the handout later. Or annotate the handout to help concentrate on the lecture.

• Chinese lecturers need to use English in the lecture as it is the policy of the university and it will help students in the exams to be able to conceptualise the topics in English. Some Cantonese may be helpful in the short term, but as English is probably the language of the discipline the more exposure you get to English the better.

Advice to Lecturers

• Make your style of lecturing explicit to the students. That is, tell the students how you organise your lectures and what you expect of them during a lecture.

• Give students clear signals of when you are talking about basic facts and when you are giving your own opinions.

• Give students some focus questions at the beginning of each lecture. Tell them that if they can answer the questions by the end of the lecture, then they will have understood the main points.

• Introduce specialist terminology when required. Do not expect that the students will already know the terminology. Clearly sign when you are defining terms.

• Pause more during lectures to allow students time to catch up with their comprehension.
• For Chinese lecturers, decide how to interpret university and departmental policy on the use of English in lectures and try to implement your interpretation. Inform the students what the policy is and how you interpret it.

• Try to find out what your students’ attitudes are towards the use of their mother tongue – you may find that some want more Cantonese and others want more English. Explain to your students what your position is to them regarding the use of the two languages.

• If you feel that students have a deficiency in some study skills, then try to integrate developing these skills during the lectures. For example, use 15 minutes to have students write their own notes and check these with a neighbour.

• Try to help the students concentrate more. Ways in which this can be done include: pausing; asking focus questions; chunking the lecture into smaller units; having students form ‘buzz’ groups, that is, talking with their classmates for a few minutes on a topic during the lecture; constantly refer to the handout to show students where you are in the lecture; constantly checking the speed and complexity of language used.

References


