

DESCRIPTION

Over the course of the quarter our group will investigate the challenges that undergraduate international students face when coming to the University of Washington. International students at UW are held to the same academic standards as domestic students and earn the same degrees. We plan to research, examine pain points, ideate, iterate and revise, and finally design a solution to help meet the needs that international students who speak English as their second language face at the University of Washington.

INSIGHTS

- Speaking and understanding English in America is very different than the way it is taught in the classroom
- Ordering food and understanding menus is something that is quite difficult and use of a dictionary helps with that
- There are a lot of phrases in English that don't logically make sense and thus they are hard to guess what they mean
- Preparing for in class presentations is a lot of work and takes a lot of time and practice
- CLUE is essential for international students when writing essays or applications. It gets really busy so it is imperative that they finish their essays ahead of time so that they have the time to get it checked.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the first language that you learned to speak?
2. Do you still speak mandarin and Cantonese?
3. When did you start learning English?
4. When do you feel like you achieved this level of English?
5. Do your parents speak English?
6. What language do you speak with your parents?
7. Have you recently used a translator? Do you find yourself not knowing English words often?
8. Are there any specific situations when you become more aware that English is not your native language?
9. Is speaking and understand English more difficult in a academic or school setting or in a social situation?
10. Do you ever find that people will treat you differently, either negatively or positively, because they know that English is your second language?
11. Are there resources or groups that are helpful?
12. What do you find hardest about English right now?
13. What language is your laptop set in? What about your phone?

HCDE 318 | User Research: Formal Interview Dictation

Interviewer: Grace Barar

Interviewee

Time: 04.13.19 @ 4:00 pm

Duration: 41 minutes

Grace: So the first question is what is the first language that you learned to speak?

Interviewee: What's my first language? Chinese, Mandarin. No wait actually no. My first, first language is Cantonese and then switched to mandarin and then learned English

Grace: so English is actually your third language?

Interviewee: Yes. Oh yeah. (Laughs)

Grace: Ok. And do you still speak Mandarin and Cantonese?

Interviewee: Yeah i can sort of understand cantonese because after I learned mandarin I started like not speaking any cantonese. So when I was...before middle school I mainly talked to my grandma alot and my mom but..they both speak cantonese. Since my dad doesn't speak cantonese he can't really understand what I was saying before middle school. So um, and then in Middle school we were forced to speak in Mandarin. That is how me and my dad started to communicate.

Grace: So you didn't really speak to your dad very much before?

Interviewee: not really um yeah thats why.

Grace: did you live in the same house together?

Interviewee: Yeah same house but he is just not really close with us. And then right now i can speak fluent in Mandarin but very very little in Cantonese.

Grace: Um..So when did you start learning english?

Interviewee: Elementary School, but we dont...we learn like grammar and like mostly writing and reading very little listening and speaking so it's mostly for the test..yeah. So we don't really talk to people in english...yeah.

Grace: When do you feel like you kind of like achieved this level of english?

Interviewee: Like speaking english?

Grace: Yeah

Interviewee: Probably um sophomore year in college. Even though I prepared like study abroad and learning english but before coming here you don't have that environment like outside of the classroom you just go back to chinese so it's not like actually talking in english. But when you come here it took awhile for me to adapt the environment and people here. And then start to have more friends who are speaking in English and then once you are starting to hang out with your friends more then you start getting comfortable speaking in English. So I would say sophomore year of college.

Grace: So when you came freshman year was that the first time that you had been completely immersed in like-?

Interviewee: English speaking country?

Grace: yeah yeah

Interviewee: Yeah I have been travelling around a lot. I went to like England, Singapore, Japan even though they don't speak (english). But this is my first time....--umm

Grace: like in an academic setting?

Interviewee: Yeah, Yeah. And you have to stay here for like few years before it was more travelling. Yeah, I would say so.

Grace: So do your parents also speak english?

Interviewee: No they dont not at all. They don't even know a b c d e maybe a few. But no, not at all.

Grace: So you speak mandarin with them then?

Interviewee: yeah.

Grace: Have you recently used a translator? Do you find yourself not knowing english words?..

Interviewee: Oh yeah! That's so frequent

Grace: Really?

Interviewee: Like besides those design tools (points to illustrator, indesign, and photoshop on her computer) I have the dictionary (points to the dictionary app on her computer) Like always there. And then I have a dictionary on my phone. Because sometimes when you are waiting in line to try to order food, but you don't know what that thing is you always pull up the uh translator and uh what else...like ordering food is one main thing that i do um and then when i heard someone saying some words I can guess the spelling and then i will just like type it like really roughly on google and then search the meaning. Um..Yeah always. Always happening or I will just ask my friends like "um what do you mean" or "what does that word mean" (laughs)

Grace: I guess that kind of leads into the next question are there like specific situations when you become more aware that english is not your native language?

Interviewee: A Lot of the time. Um like sometimes if its like just lecture I think it's fine. But if it's more conversational like people use a lot of slang and like short terms of the word. I was like what that doesn't make sense.

Grace: Right.

Interviewee The other day when i was in University Kitchen and then there's a phrase "Please bus your tray" or something. Like "bus"? It doesn't make sense to me. I was asking Jordan, my boyfriend, like "bus. Really?" and he was like "oh the guy who cleans the stuff is called a busboy" and I was like "What? How? How does that make

sense?" So a lot of words like out of the context I can't even take a guess. So i need to learn those by seeing them or having a conversation with someone when they are using it. I know that i could use this word in this context later. So yeah like if you just google some words like that single phrase I can't put it in the sentence. And what if it doesn't make sense in the context? You know?

Grace: Yeah. Yeah interesting

Interviewee: Hmmm....what are some other...or...People speaking really fast umm it's just hard to catch up with them. Um. yeah. What Else...yeah i am more comfortable speaking with people who like english is also their second language. Because the word level that we use is kinda the same.

Grace: Even if their first language isn't Chinese?

Interviewee: Yeah. Yeah.

Grace: interesting!

Interviewee: Yeah, like we understand each other for some reason. It's always like "just that thing" and I got it but the other friends don't get it because they don't have the same contact. Um...and then...yeah.

Grace: Um, so like is there a difference and which is more difficult like a school setting speaking and understanding english or like a social setting?

Interviewee: Ah that's a good one. Ok so like usually we have a lot of presentation in HCDE right?

Grace: yeah

Interviewee: A lot of people just like get up and talk. I can't do that.

Grace: right.

Interviewee: um so before each like presentation I need to practice like a lot a lot. I need to write down every single word that I am going to say and just like repeat them again and again. I can't just like get up and talk because I will lose the logic.

Grace: that's difficult

Interviewee: Umm...but when you are hanging out with friends its like its more like interactive. So like if you don't understand something you can ask. But if they just keep going I feel like i am being left out, like I am being excluded from the conversation because I can't just like always ask "oh what do you mean? What do you mean? What do you mean by that?" I would just like "You guys. You guys can talk now. I am gonna (laughs) uh step away (laughs)". Yeah but like in terms of like understanding more academic terms I think that is easier for me.

Grace: Academic is easier?

Interviewee: Because like they are formal English words it's not like something where you can't even take a guess.

Grace: Right, and the professors usually speak clearly?

Interviewee: yeah definitely.

Grace: Interesting. Do you...like have you become more confident like asking people what they mean or has that changed at all like now compared to freshman year? Do you have a lot of friends who are from Seattle or whose first language is English?

Interviewee: so my freshman year I was hanging out with a group of people who were from out of the state and then umm I have another Korean friends, so I didn't really hang out with Chinese friends freshman year. And my ex-boyfriend is in that group.

Grace: the freshman year group?

Interviewee: yeah. So he can speak a little Chinese and a little English um that's like when we were having conversation it's like half Chinese half English. Um but if I'm hanging out with other people in the group it's just like dominant English but since the group of people English is their first language they are being less aware of me and my other Korean friend don't speak English so when they were having conversation it's just really hard for us to understand or even come into the conversation. Um yeah that's why I feel really excluded in the group um because I feel like when we are having one to one conversation with like one of them (old group of friends) it just feels like they are slowing down too much it's like they are trying to let us understand. We are being treated differently or they are trying to like not talk about too many things so that we can understand but that makes me feel really uncomfortable. Um, you could just like say the same thing in a different way. And then umm later, me and my ex-boyfriend broke up and then um some part of the reason is because of language even though he can understand Chinese but not really even though I can understand English but not really.

So that kind of creates like a barrier between us. Um and in terms of asking questions in freshman year i do try to guess alot and not ask questions uh it just make it awkward. You like interrupt other people's conversations and people have to explain the whole thing to you uh again so but when i was...so after i broke up with my boyfriend...after six months I met Jordan, my current boyfriend he is very um...so whenever I try to guess something and then he knows I dont know that word he was like "do you understand this word? Do you know what this means?" and I was like "Uhh no" and then he was like "You have to ask me every time" So thats how I guess I started if I dont understand something I am going to ask him, I am going to ask other people. Um but I am pretty sure alot of other international students they will be just like following the flow like not asking questions and its like or not even hanging out with people who speak english as their native language. Its just their comfort zone.

Grace: Right right

Interviewee: But my goal of coming here is not just like hanging out with other Chinese friends or just complete my degree its more about knowing the culture, knowing the language and hanging out with friends that people that I am not really familiar with.

Grace: yeah, wow Interesting. Um did you...when coming here did you think adjusting to cultural shifts or language shifts was more difficult? Or were they just like kind of combined?

Interviewee: I would say...What do you mean by cultural?

Grace: Like the way people interact and like social interactions? Housing maybe? Like living in the dorms?

Interviewee: I would say people here are more straightforward they will just tell whatever they feel but in chinese like in my culture people hide their feeling a lot like um but like I am a person who are more open about my feelings, so I might fit in this culture more. But like a lot of my friends they are like “you’re too straightforward” (laughs) um because the language in chinese is structured in a way that the language itself is not open or direct enough you know? We have a lot of like hidden meaning things. But (laughs) um here people talk about things a lot, having more conversations um which is something that I really like. People like are being honest about themselves but a lot of the time in my culture people will just hide it or like not talk about it. Um It's like two different sides...Um but so culture or language? They are pretty tied together um but i feel like i am speaking english like the whole day when I go back, I have three other Chinese roommates, a lot of the time I just feel like I can't remember the words in chinese anymore.

Grace: Interesting...because like all of your experiences throughout the day have been in english.

Interviewee: oh yeah and sometimes when you are dreaming its in english. Its just like when you are morphing into the culture like it started happening. Um or like when you are speaking in your dream sometimes you are speaking in english instead of chinese. Its a little weird. And when I was talking to my parents I just like take a longer time to think of that words in chinese. But I know those words in English, like definitely. It just when you are closer to one culture you are probably a little more far away from the other one. That's something that I am feeling.

Grace: You kinda already touched on this a little bit but do you ever find that people treat you differently either negatively or positively because they know that english is your second language?

Interviewee: hmmm. This doesn't happen to me alot but..yeah. But i am pretty sure like at least 90% of the other international students they will not try because they know that people will discriminate they so they are not even trying. So people will make

assumptions about the things that they haven't even done. And if one person can't really fit into the conversation people will start to exclude them that's so natural so if they jump in the conversation and their english is not good and people take a long time to wait until the person finishes the conversation it just the person will feel really embarrassed right? So i think the more it happens the more people will start even trying. My other roommate she just is afraid to talk to people who are like fluent in english just like because we need to try extra hard to let other people understand us and if people feel "oh I have to wait for you" or "I have to explain things to you all the time" we are scared too. That's why you can see a lot of international students just hanging out with international students. Because that is where they can speak their native language.

Grace: You mentioned that when you came here you are looking to do more than just get the degree. Is this uncommon? Can you talk a little bit more about that?

Interviewee: A lot of people just want to get it (the degree) done and then go back. I think it does open up a lot of opportunities here like the majority of people here english is their first language. Even though you can get a degree but you miss a lot in your college life because you will be eating chinese food hanging out with chinese people going to chinese festivals but what else? Like other opportunities. So um...I mean people have different way of spending their 4 years here but it depends on what they want to get out of here. But i do think if people are more open about this be honest that "if you dont understand then just ask me" that really opens my mind up like just like oh I can be comfortable around you. I can be honest about it if i don't understand even though it's very stupid but I have never been exposed to this. Like how am i supposed to know?

(laughs)

Grace: (Laughs) Like bus your table who came up with that?

Interviewee: (Laughs) yeah like those little things they add up right? So if you start to be afraid of asking questions or being around people who speak english you be scared a

lot more later. Um yeah probably more for the people who come here they want to be social but they don't know how to.

Grace: Yeah and it's hard to like ask for help. Are there like resources? Like are there groups on campus that are helpful?

Interviewee: I think that there is a student association its called FIUIT where they pair one domestic student with one international student and then they have a meeting or dinner each week and then they will go on like a road trip. So its kinda trying to minimize the gap between international students and domestic students. Um that's like for the people who want to hang out with other people (domestic students).

Grace: right you kind of have to make that decision actively.

Interviewee: Um what else...maybe...some clubs...but not really they are more just like Chinese student clubs or Korean student clubs. Um they way that I know people like who are like outside of my comfort zone is more by interests like people in the major (HCDE)...English is hard.

Grace: English is hard for sure. What do you find hardest about it like right now?

Interviewee: Writing is definitely the hardest and then speaking and then probably listening and then reading.

Grace: What makes the writing hard is it like the grammar or finding the words to express?

Interviewee: Both. Like we can have the logic but sometimes the logic doesn't make sense in English that is the hardest part. But that is very easy to resolve. But it's the grammar part like I need to go to CLUE or odegard to always get someone to check because if not then I know my grades will get really low just because of that just because people will have trouble reading my essay. Um yah...

Grace: Do you think a lot of international students utilize CLUE and those resources for that reason?

Interviewee: You will see that like it's packed there if there is an application due or there is an essay due. Um like all the people chinese or international will go there just to like get their grammar done. So you have to plan ahead. It means that I have to finish my essay earlier so that I have time to get the check.

Grace: So is there any like online resource that you use for the same reason?

Interviewee: Yeah! I have umm grammarly. Me and other international students we bought the account together so there is like a year thing and we share resources. Its like you have to install it on your laptop.

Grace: are there any other tools that you use to help you like this?

Interviewee: Uhhhh writing that's the only thing. OH what I would do is, this is stupid but, I would type out the sentence in google and see if what are some words that people are using for the same meaning. Just like I have a general sentence but google search will pop up some words that I can recognize but I barely use it so i'm like "oh that's a cool word to use!" and I will substitute that in my sentence.

Grace: Honestly I do that too.

Interviewee: I would say it really takes practice like even though you speak english in the classroom that's way little part of it. It's more about talking to people in your everyday life and speaking english in that environment because if you are hanging out with friends you will be in different contexts you will be in the restaurants you will be hanging out. But the set of words that you are using are different. So the more you are being in those scenarios the more you will be comfortable in that space.

Grace: Can you talk more about like ordering food? You mentioned you always have the dictionary pulled up when you are in line.

Interviewee: Yeah umm lets see. I could search on the history...OH and then another thing is people's name.

Grace: oh interesting!

Interviewee: I need to put on...so If i am interviewing with a recruiter and the name is like I don't have never seen it before I will put it in the youtube for pronunciation and then I will keep repeating it. OR like before presentations there are some keywords that I always need to remind myself and sometimes i will record it or I will let my boyfriend record it so that I can listen to it later. So yeah I mean there are definitely different tricks (laughs). So yeah youtube for people's names and ummm for food.

Grace: Oh I forgot this question! I didn't even write it down because it was a small question. But like your laptop and your phone do you have them set in mandarin or?

Interviewee: Oh for my laptop I set it in English because just sometimes people will show the tools (design programs) in english, the tutorials is in english so it's easier to follow. But for my phone before I had it all in Chinese first reason is that if someone pick up my phone and they won't understand my applications so like yeah.

Grace: oh haha so for like privacy then?

Interviewee: Yeah privacy yah but then later my boyfriend changed it to english just so that he can understand (laughs). But the main application I am using its in Chinese. But laptop wise, it's all in English. That's kind of interesting I didn't even notice that.

Grace: yeah hmm maybe because like school life and then social and personal life. Cool. Thank you so much for doing this!