Language Barriers and the International Community

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& BTW 250-D2_06-02

EVOKE
About the Ethnographer

We are confident that we will be able to address this problem from various facets. Our group comprises of individuals from different cultural backgrounds and ethnicities. Josephine, an international student herself, feels that she would be able to relate to the dilemma faced by other non-native speakers when faced with such an overwhelming experience as that of college life. BTW 250-D2_06-02, another international student, aims to incorporate various personal experiences. Having had difficulty in communicating with people on his arrival, he has had first-hand experience of the problem of language barrier. Noreida and Graham are American citizens whose opinion might perhaps best represent the view of native English-speakers in general. Also, Noreida's first language being Spanish, and not English, she had to take bilingual classes for the first three years of her schooling. This gives her some experience on language barriers in a learning environment. Additionally, Graham has had international teaching assistants and it has been difficult for him to learn effectively or understand the course material at times; thus, he would be able to provide an insight of the problems faced by native speakers on coming into contact with international faculty members.

EXPLORE
Question
What questions is your inquiry contingent upon?
In this project, the following questions are addressed.

1. Is the problem of language barrier prevalent in the campus?

2. What are the causes of language barrier?

3. How does language barrier affect the academic performance of international students and the teaching effectiveness of international TAs?

4. What resources and facilities are currently available to international students?

5. What could be done to improve the situation?

Plan
How will you go about answering your inquiry?
How will you go about answering your inquiry

In obtaining a detail insight into the problem of language barrier in the campus, we have conducted two surveys and a few interviews as listed below:

1. Survey on international students (with sample of 41 students).
2. Survey on students having an international TAs (with sample of 60 students).

3. Interview with an international TA, and a TA with experiences teaching international students.
4. Interview with ISSS officer.

Researches are performed on some secondary resources such as book, articles and online informations in order to better understand the issue of language barrier.
Files:
Project timeline.doc (Sun 04/30/2006 23:27)

OBSERVE
What observations, or findings are you encountering in your research?

Survey #1: International students. Based on our survey on a sample consisted of 41 international students, we found that most of the international students are more or less having trouble communicating with Americans. In general, they attributed the causes of language barriers to American English accent, structure of English, uses of phrases and Idioms, language style and also cultures. Due to the language barriers, approximately 1/3 of the students responded that their academic performance has been affected slightly, quite or greatly. Also, our surveys analyzed that evaluation of one's English proficiency based on the TOEFL test could be inaccurate sometimes. Hence, students with high TOEFL result could face the same degree of language barrier like others international students. Last but not least, our survey analysis showed that majority of the students are not aware of the resources and facilities.

Survey #2: native english speakers with international teaching assistants. We administered our survey to 60 undergraduate students walking through or sitting on the main quad. 46 out of 60 respondents said that the teaching abilities of their international teaching assistants were acceptable, good or excellent. 23% of students that felt that their teaching assistants were unsatisfactory. Fifty-six percent of our respondents said that they have problems communicating with their international teaching assistant. Thirteen students even said that they switched out of a discussion section just to avoid the communication problems that they would have incurred had they stayed in the section. One of our questions asked student how hard they think their teaching assistants are working in order to achieve better oral proficiency. All but five of the responses were either hard or very hard. This shows that for the most part there is not hatred between students and international teaching assistants, but instead a relationship where it is understood that there are obstacles to a shared goal.

Interview TA experience with international students:

The findings suggest from this interview suggest that language barriers exist, but there are ways to help this problem, for example, even in classes where participation is key. But TAs can encourage the asking of questions and also group work that will help break through these barriers. Also from this interview the teaching assistant thought that the university can do more about this issue with studetns not being exposed to diverse backgrounds and reaces/enthnicities.

Interview with International TA:

In this interview the international TA was leading one discussion course, but did not see a major impact in the effectiveness of her teaching or her students' learning of the material. She felt her teaching effectiveness was only affected when she did not have past

experience or knowledge on the material being addressed. She did mention that international students went to office hours at times to ask for help, but not so much because of language barriers, but because of problems with writing papers due to the different writing styles.

Overall, both interviews were insgihtful and useful for this particular topic. It was interesting to find out that lanugage barriers existed but did not seem to greatly affect students learning or teaching affectiveness. It was interesting to find that both TAs felt that students had bad preconceptions of them as they walked into to class the first time.
Files:
Group 4 Bibliography.doc (Tue 04/18/2006 23:47)
Survey result (Intl students).doc (Sun 04/30/2006 23:47)

DISCUSS
Discuss your inquiry, taking care to separate speculation from fact or data
Rough Draft
Files:
roughdraft-final.doc (Mon 04/24/2006 2:59)
btw 250 - project final copy.doc (Mon 05/01/2006 7:40)
btw - survey for intl students.doc (Mon 05/01/2006 7:43)
btw - survey for students with intl TAs.doc (Mon 05/01/2006 7:43)
btw - survey results.doc (Mon 05/01/2006 7:44)
btw - interview questions.doc (Mon 05/01/2006 7:47)
btw 250 - project final copy - revised!.doc (Mon 05/01/2006 9:10)

REFLECT
Link
Connect with other resources and materials.
Brown, H. D. (1941). Breaking the language barrier: Creating your own pathway to success. Maine:
Intercultural Press

Division of Management Information. (2005). Enrollment by curriculum, race, sex, residency. Retrieved March 30, 2006 from
http://www.dmi.uiuc.edu/stuenr/index.htm#race

ISSS Advisor (personal communication, April 19, 2006) endorses this view.

Müller, K. E. (Ed.). (1992). Papers of the Center for Research and Documentation to World Language Problems

Vol. 2: Language as Barrier and Bridge. Maryland: University Press of America.

Santiago, Elizabeth (personal communication, April 21, 2006) endorses this view.

Subject 1 (personal communication, April 20, 2006) endorses this view.

Subject 2 (personal communication, April 20, 2006) endorses this view.

Survey of International Students. Administered to 50 University of Illinois Students

between April 13th and April 18th 2006.

Survey of Students with International Teaching Assistants. Administered to 50 University of Illinois Students between April 13th and April 18th 2006.

Trice, Andrea G. Mixing It Up: International Graduate Students' Social Interactions With American Students November/December 2004, pp. 671-687 - Article. (2004). Mixing it up: International graduate students' social interactions with American students. Journal of College Student Development, 45(6), March 31, 2006. Retrieved March 31, 2006, from http://muse.jhu.edu.proxy2.library.uiuc.edu/journals/journal_of_college_student_development/v045/45.6trice.html.

Walters, K. & Brody, M. (Eds.). (2005). What's Language Got to Do With It?. Suite for Ebony and Phonics. pp. 278-286 http://web.library.uiuc.edu.proxy2.library.uiuc.edu/eres-122005jQ2z/Rickford_suite_whats.pdf

Wang, J. & Frank D.G. (2002). Cross-Cultural Communication: Implications for Effective Information Services in Academic Libraries. Retrieved April 5, 2006 from http://muse.jhu.edu.proxy2.library.uiuc.edu/journals/portal_libraries_and_the_academy/v002/2.2wang.html

Wikipedia (2006). Language Barrier. Retrieved April 19, 2006 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language_barrier

Implications
Could your findings have broader implications beyond this inquiry?
Our findings suggest that language barriers do exist within a university environment. Where there are international students and teaching assistants there are bound to be some complications with language, some even small. But overall, this is a topic that is very important to consider and take a look at. Students may not be getting the quality education they are paying for, and international teaching assistants may not be given a fair non-biased opportunity to really shine as an educator if language is a problem in the classroom. This topic of language barrier exists outside of the classroom, for example. language barriers exist within faculty and departments and even businesses at the university. Language barriers are negative not only in the classroom because it hinders effective and a quality education, but also because in a business communication and understanding is just as important in order to meet goals, work as a team, and get things done. Communication between people of different cultures and races/ethnicities is very important, because we live in a country where there is a diverse range of different backgrounds and working with someone or trying to communicate with one another is essential. Therefore this topic of language barrier has could be applied in many different situations and it is a problem, for the most part.

OTHER
A space for other notes, findings, comments, etc.
Below are the questionnaire used for the surveys:
Files:

Survey (Intl Student).doc (Mon 04/24/2006 0:27)
Survey (Intl TA).doc (Mon 04/24/2006 0:28)
questionsforrd.doc (Mon 05/01/2006 3:11)