International students: language acquisition issues and facilitating effective communication

Social English language proficiency and Academic English Language proficiency are very different. A student may be more proficient in one but not the other. A student’s level of Academic English may be masked by a higher level of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICs) compared to their Cognitive Academic Language Profanely (CALP).

Students can develop social English skills in six months to two years, while academic English can take five to seven years.

Channel C: Conversing in Two Languages

The mission of Channel C is to “hold resonating conversations through multimedia on the internet to debunk misunderstandings between the Chinese student body and the host communities and inspire ongoing dialogues that build understanding and trust.”


Writing Across Borders

“Writing Across Borders” was a 3-year documentary project funded by Oregon State University’s Center for Writing and Learning and its Writing Intensive Curriculum Program. The documentary’s purpose was to help faculty, writing assistants, and other professionals work more productively with international students in writing environments.

*Clips and DVD available http://writingcenter.oregonstate.edu/writing-across-borders ($12.50)

We No Speak Americano

“We No Speak Americano” documents international first-year students’ experiences learning to writer academically in English and in their native languages as well as reveals the difficulties they face transitioning to university-level writing in America. *From Duke University

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V7pYB6W049I

When speaking to Non-Native English Speakers…

1. Speak a little slower than “normal American” pace (but still naturally) and articulate your words clearly.

2. Give students time to understand what you have said before expecting a response. Don’t immediately start repeating (or rephrasing) what you have just said. *it’s like hitting the refresh button on your computer – the green status bar starts over from the beginning.

3. Repeat a question or sentence verbatim before trying to rephrase.
   - Language learners need time to process what you have said. Rephrasing requires them to process two or more utterances, decreasing the likelihood of comprehension.

4. Simplify sentence structures.

* Denotes comments added by Tina Oman
• **Rather than:** “even though you will have to change your password the next time your log-in, you can register on eSIS with your current password.”

• **Try:** “Now you can register on eSIS with this password. But next time you need to change your password.

5. Make direct requests or ask direct questions.

• **Rather than:** “In order to take care of that hold on your account you are going to need a valid credit card. Do you have one?”

• **Try:** “You need a credit card.”

6. Use simple, clear vocabulary and avoid specific-vocabulary that students may not know.

7. When specific vocabulary is important, **pre-teach the vocabulary** or give students a handout listing terms and their expressions.

8. Use simple printed handouts to support your communication needs.

   • Explicitly point out key information on handouts.
   
   • Use **bold**, **italics**, **underlining**, and color to make key information stand out.

   • Use pictures, visuals, media and **realia** (objects, examples, things, etc.)

   How to use realia in ESL lessons

9. Use nonverbal cues such as gestures, facial expressions, and nodding to help convey meaning.

   *Be careful – gestures may have different meanings to them.

10. Clearly mark transitions when changing topics or focus, explicitly signal the changes (e.g. “**First** we will…,” “**Now** it’s time for…”).

11. Avoid using idioms and colloquialisms.

   **Rather than:**
   “Tuition in the US costs and arm and a leg.”
   “I hear you.”
   “Feeling a bit under the weather?”

   **Try:**
   “Tuition is expensive in the US.”
   “I understand you.”
   “Are you sick?”

When listening to Non-Native English Speakers...

• Focus on **what the student is saying** instead of on the difference in accent and pronunciation.

• Look at the student and pay attention to both **verbal and nonverbal cues**, which help convey meaning.

• **Ask the student to write** down words that you do not understand.

• **Ask the student to repeat** what he or she said if you do not understand.

• **Paraphrase what you think** the student said if you are unsure that you understood him or her. For example: “So you want me to...” or “Let me see if I understood you. You said that...”

• * You also may find it helpful to **ask students to paraphrase** what you have said.