Plenary Speeches Given by Prof. Nick Ellis and Dr. Boping Yuan at the Inaugural Conference of the Teachers College, Columbia University Roundtable in Second Language Studies (TCCRISLS)

Adrienne Wai Man Lew
Teachers College, Columbia University

Students from our doctoral seminar in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), guided by the vision from Prof. ZhaoHong Han, organized the world's first conference on the acquisition of Chinese as a second or foreign language, which took place from September 30 to October 2, 2010.

As noted by Teachers College President Susan Fuhrman in her opening speech for the conference, "there could not be a better moment to focus on the growing role that China and Chinese will play in all our lives."

The three-day conference attracted proposal submissions from the USA, Mainland China, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Australia, Ireland and so on, with close to 100 being eventually accepted for paper and poster sessions beginning the second day. These accepted proposals covered a diverse range of empirical interests, including repeated reading and vocabulary acquisition, the roles and functions of L2 input and output, L2 phonological acquisition, and the role of linguistic relativity in the acquisition of motion verbs among L2 learners of Chinese.

The two-day pre-conference workshop on task-based language teaching (TBLT), starting September 30, demonstrated how theoretical concepts and constructs in SLA such as the Cognition Hypothesis, task complexity, etc., could fuel the actual design of learning tasks of the lessons for any L2 class. Led by Prof. ZhaoHong Han and K. Philip Choong, one of the conference co-chairs, the participants experienced first-hand how they could link theory to pedagogy ─ through getting down to design their own learning task(s) ─ with their specific groups of learners in mind.

Prof. Nick Ellis from the University of Michigan presented the audience with a concise yet encompassing overview of the most significant findings on L2 cognition over the past 20 years, which evoked enthusiastic rounds of questions from members of the audience later on:

Second Language Cognition

Nick Ellis, Professor of Psychology and English Language Institute Research Scientist at the University of Michigan

Dr. Boping Yuan from the University of Cambridge demonstrated how SLA research methodology from the generative tradition could be applied to analyzing problematic structures for L2 learners of Chinese. His ultimate goal was to help practitioners arrive at a more cogent understanding of the learnability issue in the acquisition of Chinese:

Second Language Acquisition of Chinese at a Semantics-Syntax Interface: Evidence from Chinese Wh-Words Used as Existential Polarity Words

Prof. Boping Yuan, University Senior Lecturer at University of Cambridge

[Note: This plenary speech is presented in Mandarin Chinese.]

The TESOL/AL Web Journal would like to cordially thank the Organizing Committee of TCCRISLS for allowing us the pleasure of providing our readers with exclusive access to the plenary speeches above.

To read more about the conference, please visit:

A&H report on the conference: http://artsandhumanities.pressible.org/lydiakim917/an-innovative-conference-second-language-acquisition-of-chinese

College report: http://www.tc.edu/news/article.htm?id=7722