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Developing Adults' Oral English Communicative Competence in an EFL Environment: Collaborative Studies of a Chinese EFL Teacher and Her Students

Feng Luo

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Abstract

Economic and educational globalization presents Chinese college students with career and academic incentives to develop their oral English communicative competence; however, at the secondary level, students study English mainly for the purpose of written tests. As a result, their oral English learning is largely overlooked. In addition, significant challenges exist for learning oral English at the college level: large-sized classes, an English-as-a-foreign-language-learning (EFL) environment, traditional rote learning, student diversity, and different English-learning histories. This research aims at investigating effective teaching pedagogy suitable for large-sized college classes of students developing oral communicative competence in an EFL environment. With Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as a foundation, I apply practitioner action research to conduct two phases of study. The action applies a collaborative, communication-oriented pedagogy in a large-sized oral English class. In phase one of the study, students' group or pair work on communicative activities promotes and facilitates their social interactions in

an EFL environment that enhance comprehensible input and output. In phase two of the study, continual practicing of communicative activities in groups or pairs facilitates their oral English grammatical knowledge, speaking strategies and sociocultural discourse rules through meaning negotiation and EFL teacher and or learners' collaboration and assistance. Also, practicing communicative activities actively engages students in their own learning process and offers a new role for the EFL teacher: introducing language social rules, directing students to resources, encouraging peer-to-peer assistance, and focusing on feedback that enhances strategic competence. Therefore, I suggest that for developing students' oral English communicative competence in an EFL environment with large-sized classes, consistent group or pair work using diverse communicative activities should be applied.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In 1978, People's Republic of China (PRC) began to implement its "Reform and Opening up" (Jin & Young, 2006) policies to focus on national economic development. Under the guidance of these national policies, over the past 35 years, China has lowered many of its trade barriers and engaged heavily in world trade. This radical transformation from a "centrally-planned economy towards a market-oriented socialist economy" (Tsang, 2000, p. 579) has resulted in one of the world's fastest growing economies.

Educational innovations were emphasized as a means of growing the economy (Hu, 2002, 2003, 2005a; Hu & McKay, 2012; Tsang, 2000; Wang, 2008). Foreign language education, mainly English language education was, and is, regarded as necessary for access to world trade. In addition, English is seen as the "international medium of scientific and technological information" (Hu, 2005a, p. 7). English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching in China has flourished with the development of the economy and globalization. Beckett and Macpherson (2005) have observed that:

In the PRC, English has become a prerequisite for high paying jobs and promotion, and it is a required subject starting from as early as kindergarten in some areas. With the PRC's entry to the world Trade Organization in 2001 and the awarding of the 2008 Olympic Games to Beijing, pressures to acquire English as a foreign or international language have only increased. (p. 304)

In response to a demand to learning English and develop English proficiency, there has been a great drive to improve English teaching in the formal Chinese education system (Hu, 2002, 2003, 2005b).

Shifting Policies of English Education in China from 1978 until the Present

Reviewing the shifting policies related to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching is meant to give insight into English language education in China from a native point of view. I hope that such insight might give my readers a better glimpse of contemporary transformation of English language education in China, along with the transformational influence on college students' English language communicative competence development, especially oral English skills.

My background. Born in China, in 1976, I grew up and learned at precisely the right time to observe and be affected by a series of political, economic and educational reforms. Receiving all of my education in China, I became an English teacher, working at a university in Wuhan for ten years. Though fully bilingual now, I didn't begin to learn English until I entered the eighth grade. After six years of intensive English grammar training at the secondary level, I decided on English as my college major and therefore as my career. Five years into my teaching career, I completed an MA in English linguistics at Huazhong University of Science and Technology. In the summer of 2008, I travelled to the United States to enter a Ph.D. program in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) at the University of New Mexico. My knowledge of the English language, as presented to me in grades eight to twelve, came mainly through analyzing grammar and memorizing vocabulary. During each and every class period, the teacher would read new vocabulary first, and then ask us to read and repeat after her. Next, we would use pattern drills and grammar exercises to enhance our vocabulary learning. At the end of class, my teacher would always assign many grammar exercises as homework meant to build on and reinforce our understanding of different English language rules.

During the 1980s, although China had already proposed the new “Reform and Opening up” policies several years prior, economic and public education development were still feeble and inadequate, not yet up to the task of renovating China (Hu, 2002, 2005a; Wang, 2008). Poorly designed textbooks and under-trained teachers were usually the only resources for English language instruction outside of larger cities (Hu, 2005a). Even within the larger, more economically developed cities not every school could provide their students with up to date texts, study materials or even well trained teachers (Garbe & Mahon, 1983). At the secondary level of my English learning, English teachers and textbooks were my only resources. Fortunately, I had well trained English teachers.

In college, I studied English in the Foreign Language Department. All of my teachers used English almost exclusively to lecture on any subject. The emphasis for learning English was no longer overly concerned with grammar, but became more usage-oriented instead. That is, students had to be able to actually use English if we wanted to make it through the various courses we were taking. This new kind of coursework combined many subjects with our language studies, covering topics such as language and society, language and culture, language and literature, language and teaching, and so on. With the economic development of the 1990s, China became more open, and I had greater access to various English language resources. For the first time, I had several native English language teachers who focused on English language interaction and students’ participation in the classroom. All the new measures were aimed at helping us use our new language and develop interactional skills. My second language improved greatly, especially my oral English and listening ability.

After I obtained my bachelor's degree, I found a job as an English teacher at a local university. Most of my new students had learned English the same way I had learned English before I began college. They had enough grammatical knowledge, but they needed to develop oral and listening skills, and their peer-to-peer interactive skills were at the beginning stage of language development at best. Although I had been fortunate in having excellent teachers, both Chinese and Western, for most students the outdated traditional ways of teaching language still play a major role in the classroom and prevent Chinese students from fully developing the second language communicative competence necessary to meet the ever-increasing English language requirements they will soon face in the job market. Especially since the beginning of the 21st century, with the fast growth of economic globalization and internationalization of education, foreign languages (mainly English) became useful as tools for international trade and for the seeking out of cultural information and exchange (Beckett & Macpherson, 2005; Hu, 2002; Hu & McKay, 2012; Rao, 1996; Wu, 2001). In China, being proficient in English usually brings people high salaries and promotion opportunities (Beckett & Macpherson, 2005; Hu, 2003; Hu & Alsagoff, 2010; Hu & McKay, 2012).

Meanwhile, since 1978, the government of China has tried to re-establish its higher education system. An ever-increasing number of Chinese students attend university in an attempt to receive a higher education and therefore a greater chance at obtaining a good job. Because of the large population and a slower job market increase, there is always severe competition for nearly all, if not all, available job positions. To most parents and students in China, having a university degree means a greater chance at finding a decent job in the future. The increasing student population has put huge

pressure on educational resources causing greater and greater shortfalls each year.

Teaching and learning in a language class of at least 40 students is difficult for both teachers and students alike.

My primary motivation to constantly improve myself and my teaching ability stems from two factors: students' expectations for developing their English communicative competence, especially their oral English competence, so that they might better face the fierce competition of the job market that I have had to face; my struggle to effectively teach oversized language classes in a non-English speaking environment. Now I am living and learning in the United States, looking for better pedagogical solutions to oversized language classes and for the knowledge necessary to improve my ability to teach English, especially oral English in China.

Four stages of EFL education change. Since 1978, in order to meet national economic development needs, the Education Department of the central government has set and reset a number of policies to meet those needs. EFL education in China has gone through four stages of change due to shifting central government education policies. The first stage began in 1978 and ran until 1982. The main task of the first stage was an attempt to recover English language education and education in general after their nearly complete destruction as a result of the Cultural Revolution (Hu, 2005a). The second stage began in 1983 and lasted until 1986. During this period reformation and reconstruction of the English language educational system was conducted. The third stage began in 1987 and lasted until 2000. In this stage, the educational system was transformed from a state welfare program, via a business model, into an educational industry (Yang, 2009). English language education was not exempt from these changes, and English language

educational methodologies were promoted while language communicative development was emphasized (Hu, 2005a, 2005 b; Hu & McKay, 2012). From the turn of the new century to the present is the fourth stage. The government further readjusted the basic utilitarian (Hu, 2005a) English language education policy to a higher quality education policy focusing on language communicative competence. The adjustment is in response to the fast-paced national economic development of China's flourishing international business interests and the increasingly fast-paced and ongoing information and culture exchange with the rest of the world (Hu, 2002, 2005b; Wang, 2008).

The first stage. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the Chinese national leaders felt that “too large a gap had developed between life in cities and that in the countryside, between mental and manual labor, and between the peasants and the growing elite of intellectuals and bureaucrats” (Grabe & Mahon, 1983, p. 49). As a result, Chinese education went through a radical change. Grabe and Mahon (1983) wrote that “it was considered dangerous to be an intellectual. Study and research were discouraged. School faculty was demeaned and like students, sent to work in factories and on farms” (p. 49). Any class time remaining to the students was used for political study. Education curriculum emphasized production needs and ignored the development of liberal arts (Grabe & Mahon, 1983). At that time, people no longer respected knowledge and education; many scholars had been tortured both physically and psychologically. Students' work unit recommendations, family background (workers or peasants preferred) and their work attitudes mainly determined the students' opportunities to go to college (Grabe & Mahon, 1983). The educational system lay all but dead for nearly 10 years (Hu, 2002). English language, especially, was treated as the “language of the enemy” and

“virtually all English teaching programs were abolished in the school system” (Wang, 2008, p. 4). In 1978, after the Chinese government had put an end to the Cultural Revolution, the central government began to correct the many mistakes that had been made during the course of the revolution. While the central government was engaged in this process, a new leader, Chairman Deng Xiaoping, launched a national modernization program. He insisted that advanced science and technology were the keys to national modernization and revitalization (Grabe & Mahon, 1983; Hu, 2005a). Learning a foreign language, especially English, was regarded as a necessary tool for learning advanced international scientific and technological information. As a result, “to receive and expand English language education became an integral part of the modernization drive” (Hu, 2005a, p. 7). Within the guidelines of the national modernization program policies, the central government implemented the introduction of foreign language learning in primary schools at grade three and in secondary schools at grade seven (HERC, 1993; Hu, 2003). As for higher education and English language learning, the reconstruction work included an English language curriculum designed only for science major undergraduates in 1980, including editing and publishing of English language textbooks for science major undergraduates only (from 1980-1982). The design of the textbooks was largely focused on training students’ English language reading ability so that science majors could effectively understand advanced technology from English language sources. In 1979, university entrance exams weighed the importance of English language ability at just 10% of the total passing score. In 1980, 1981, and 1982, the percentages increased to 30%, 50% and 70%, respectively, demonstrating the steep climb in the importance of having good English language ability at the university level (Wang, 2008). Although the

central government tried to recover English language education from the disaster of the Cultural Revolution, the quality of that recovery was not satisfying (Hu, 2005a). The government and society had discerned just one concept: English was an important tool for learning international science and technology, and for facilitating national modernization. Nevertheless, English was also seen as “a vehicle for international class struggle and revolutionary diplomacy” (Wang, 2008, p. 4). In the introduction of the 1978 English language syllabus, it says: “In certain aspects, English is a very important tool for international class struggle; for economic and trade relationships; for cultural, scientific and technological exchange; and for the development of international friendship” (Adamson & Morris, 1997, p. 17). A strong political tone was reflected from this introduction and the first purpose for learning English language became for use in international class struggle. Eagleton (1991) writes that “there is a condition which Peter Sloterdijk calls enlightened false consciousness, which lives by false values but is ironically aware of doing so, and so which can hardly be said to be mystified in the traditional sense of the term” (p. 27). Constrained within their ideological point of view, the central government was attempting to partially undo the great harm caused by the Cultural Revolution. Unable or unwilling to reform their communist ideology enough to fully accept or trust new educational methodologies and ideals, including foreign language education that had existed prior to the communist revolution, the government failed to realize its reconstruction goals.

From 1978 to 1982, there was a great shortage of teachers and teaching material resources. According to Hu (2005a), “large numbers of secondary-school graduates with a smattering of English and people who were following radio or TV programs of

beginner English” (p. 12) were recruited to teach English at different levels. Some were trained in short courses and were then considered qualified to teach English. College English language education mainly targeted the training of students’ English reading ability, while other English language skills were ignored (Grabe & Mahon, 1983; Wang, 2008). Hu (2005a) concluded: “Given the overstretching of available resources in the eager expansion of English language education, it is not surprising that quality of ELT (English Language Teaching) was miserably low” (p. 12).

The second stage. With the consolidation of Chairman Deng Xiaoping’s authority (1983 until 1986), “a utilitarian orientation toward national development and education began to gain dominance” (Hu, 2005a, p. 8). Unlike Chairman Mao’s era, with education aimed at promoting “social equality” (Tsang, 2000, p. 11) and benefiting the masses, Deng Xiaoping advocated education efficiency over education equality (p. 10-11), and he emphasized that “education must face modernization, face the world, and face the future” (Tsang, 2000, p. 6). The purpose of education was in the preparation of many different skilled learners to serve the national economy (Tsang, 2000).

In order to follow the “education efficiency” policy guidance, the central government began to emphasize the importance of foreign language education teaching resources and gradually implemented several measures to improve foreign language teaching efficiency. By 1984, English language courses were no longer compulsory for rural primary schools and were prescribed only for urban primary schools where teachers were well trained and had close relations with the secondary schools (Hu, 2005a). English language education was supported in elite urban primary schools and in those secondary schools and universities where teaching resources were more readily available

and teachers were better qualified (Hu, 2005a). In the first stage, English teaching in colleges and universities only targeted science majors; however, in 1985 and 1986 the first College English Teaching Syllabi for Science majors and Liberal Arts majors were published (Wang, 2008, p. 45). The purpose of these measures was to accumulate the best available teaching resources for implementation of the promise that had been made for higher teaching quality (Hu, 2005a, 2005b).

From 1979, the central government started to set up the Special Economic Zones and experiment with a market economy in some areas, such as large coastal cities and manufacturing hubs, to develop the economy (Ge, 1999). However, unlike economic development, English language educational development still emphasized the direction and plans of the government, and it was not market driven. “The decision-making process was very much top-down and was highly dependent on the view of the top leadership, particularly that of the paramount leader” (Tsang, 2000, p. 596). In addition, according to Cookson and Sadovnik (2001):

Functionalists such as Davis and Moore (1945) argued that inequality was necessary in all societies, as it ensured that the most talented individuals would fill the most important positions. Schools play a critical role in the functionalist social scenario because achievement and advancement are based on merit rather than privilege. (p. 268)

The central government insisted that English language education be held under its power and direction, thus focusing only on key schools and training skilled talents for serving national modernization. Completely in charge of the range of English language education, the central government set the standards and could control the selection of

candidates as it wished, according to the desired outcome for promoting the course of best development for the Chinese economy.

As a result, English language test orientation was characteristic of this second stage of economic and educational reform. The higher education entrance examination had been abolished for ten years (during the Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976) and not reinstated until late 1977; however, in 1983, the English language test score section of the college entrance examination was counted as 100% of the total section score for all college majors. In 1982, only 70% of the English section test score was counted in the total passing score for college entrance (Wang, 2008). Besides the importance of written exams, English education curriculum design still focused on English language reading ability to enable students to obtain the information related to their majors through English text sources. For higher education, the English language training sequence was vocabulary, grammar, reading, listening, writing, speaking and translating (Wang, 2008).

The third stage. From 1987 to the end of the 20th century lies the third stage of China's English language education transformation. During this period, the national modernization pace sped up. The Chinese central government carried out a fundamental reform: to move away from "a centrally-planned economy towards a market-oriented socialist economy" (Tsang, 2000, p. 579). Major educational measures were applied to meet the requirements for economic growth. The measures included the implementation of nine-year compulsory education throughout the entire country (Hu, 2005a); and the transfer of power over educational direction from the central government to the provincial governments, so that provinces could directly manage their own educational affairs (Hu, 2003, 2005a, 2005b).

Feinberg and Solitis (1998) stated that “from the functionalist point of view, universal compulsory education is closely related to the requirements of industrial society providing training appropriate for participation in the social order at a certain level” (p. 17). By expanding compulsory education throughout China, a dramatic increase in the student population occurred. The overall expansion of educational facilities along with teacher and administrator positions, in addition to a vastly increased national education budget, stimulated the development of the economy. “Government budget funds for education increased from 26.50 billion Yuan (Chinese currency) in 1986 to 135.77 billion Yuan in 1997, with an average annual nominal growth rate of 16.0%” (Tsang, 2000, p. 597). The country would now gain the trained workforce it needed for the expansion of the new Chinese market economy.

Parson (2007) argued that it is well known that in American society “there is a very high, and probably increasing, correlation between one’s status level in society and one’s level of educational attainment” (p. 81). In China, this phenomenon also applies. The tradition of an individual’s social status being determined by his or her merit and education can be traced back two thousand years. “Ke Ju,” the traditional imperial examination, was used to determine an individual’s merit and education in 1100 B.C. (Cheng, 2008, p. 15). Cheng (2008) stated that in the current Chinese education system, examinations for selecting candidates are still evident (p. 16). “Gao Kao”, the National Higher Education Entrance Examination, was first administered in 1977 and has been heavily promoted by the central government since then. From 1978-1988, “student enrollment increased by an average of 12.1% per year” (Tsang, 2000, p. 610); from 1989-1998, there was a slow down due to the considerations of education quality, but

enrollment still grew at 5.3% per year; from 1998-1999, there was a 42% increase in student enrollment in one year (Tsang, 2000, p. 610). The belief is that higher education can prepare highly-skilled personnel who can play a positive role in the development of science, technology and economic development (Tsang, 2000).

The implementation of compulsory education and the popularity of higher education caused university student numbers to increase dramatically. In my teaching, I have personally experienced a huge influx of students, resulting in more and much larger classes. In 1998, my first year as a teacher, I taught three classes of 35 students each. Two years later I still taught just three classes, but now my classes were 60 students per class. Since 2002, in addition to added classes, most classes have been over 70 students, and my personal record was 94 students in one class. The increasing numbers in language classes make it very difficult for teachers and students to do any communicative practice. Reading, writing, and listening exercises are still our language learning focus during this period.

Meanwhile, quality differences in English language education between rural and urban areas were becoming increasingly greater. During the second stage, in order to gain greater teaching efficiency of English language, the central government leaned heavily on urban areas where teaching resources are better. For the third stage, educational management powers were handed over from the central government to a handful of provinces (Hu, 2003, 2005a, 2005b). “Seven economically developed provinces and centrally administrated municipalities were given the autonomy to develop their own English language curriculum, syllabus and textbooks for their primary and secondary education” (Hu, 2002, p. 33). These provinces were able to conduct international trade

with the world because of their location advantages, so in these developed areas, English language education development had both resources and the need for better language teaching (Hu, 2002, 2003, 2005a, 2005b). English language education was supported, mainly, in key schools within economically developed cities where qualified teachers and teaching materials were available (Hu, 2002, 2003, 2005a, 2005b; Wang, 2008).

Due to the increasing pressure for “individual development, creativity and exploration in education” (Hu, 2005a, p. 10), “Quality-oriented Education” was promoted in China in 1999 (Tsang, 2000, p. 588). English language education also experienced a series of reforms. At the secondary level, English teaching began to focus on English communicative competence and learner autonomy (Hu, 2005a, 2005b). In 1999, the college English language teaching syllabus stipulated that teaching at this level should emphasize English language application ability, so that students could use English to read, listen, speak, write and translate (Wang, 2008). There was, still, a yawning gap between the policy and the reality (Hu, 2005b).

English is “a compulsory subject” (Cheng, 2008, p. 16) for all universities and colleges in the National Higher Education Entrance Examination. At the primary and secondary levels, English learning is mainly involved with preparation for the college entrance examination. While in college, students’ English level is evaluated by another test: College English Test 4 (CET-4), a comprehensive test which includes English listening, reading and writing; students who receive 80 or more points on a 100-point test are allowed to participate in an extra oral English test. In 1987, at least 100,000 students took part in the first CET-4 tests (Zheng & Cheng, 2008). In addition, CET-4 certification is a requirement for graduation for undergraduates at Chinese universities (Cheng, 2008).

Test-oriented English language teaching also dominates at the college level. English communicative competence is still being overlooked in the real practice of English teaching (Cheng, 2008; Hu, 2005a; Wang, 2008).

The fourth stage. The beginning of the 21st century brought the fourth stage of English language education transformation in China. In 2001, China officially joined the World Trade Organization, strengthening its trade position, which had the effect of increasing the need for English language skills in the domestic job market. China also won its bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games, further promoting the need for learning English. English learning enthusiasm increased in keeping with national economic development and increasing interaction with the world (Beckett & Macpherson, 2005). Even so, the increased student numbers brought about by compulsory education have also produced many new university graduates, and consequently, the job market competition has become very intense. Foreign language ability, especially oral English communicative competence, has become an important advantage in the job market. China's rapid economic development requires an increase in English learners' competence so that China may communicate better with the rest of the world. Many Chinese educators have begun to criticize the "dumb English" phenomenon in China; that is, after at least six years of English learning, most students cannot orally communicate with others in English.

In 2002, the minister of the Ministry of Education wrote an article making suggestions regarding future English education development. He mentioned several major policies: transferring the focus from English language reading ability to English language competence for all language skills and enlarging the investment for English

language teaching resources and the training of teachers (Wang, 2008). The teaching of English has been renewed in the primary schools in developed areas and is a core subject for all secondary schools (Hu, 2005a). For college students, English is a required course for the first two years and for all majors (Hu, 2005a). College level English education has begun to place a lot of emphasis on English listening and speaking skills, and student directed learning programs. Computer-aided language learning (CALL) has been further extended to include more colleges, because it is believed that CALL may abate the problem of large-sized classes. Computers offer greater opportunities for students to make contact with English resources (Wang, 2008).

Findings from reviewing the four stages of English education in China. After reviewing the education policies from 1978 until the present, I have found three interesting features of the four stages of English education in China.

Test-orientation. First, there is a common point that fits all four stages of China's English language educational development. That is, English language education in China is test-orientated; reading, writing, and listening are normally covered in English language teaching, but oral English communicative competence is treated as an afterthought because it cannot be easily included in a written test. English language education is mainly about earning certificates, which should help students to find a job. Once again, oral English competence is assigned the last place on the learning list, because it is not normally included in the certificate testing. This written-test orientation in English language education has not changed, or even lessened, from 1978 to the present. According to my observations, college students' learning attitudes and motivations are heavily influenced by this focus on written tests. The lack of oral English

training at the secondary level also makes it difficult for them to start their English language oral communicative training in college, because they are used to the traditional way of learning English: memorizing words and their meanings, analyzing the grammar of sentences and passages, and ignoring communication using the second language (Gan, 2009; Rao, 1996, 2002).

Teaching quality gap. Second, there is widening gap in the quality of basic English language education between provinces and regions, between rural areas and urban areas, and between developed areas and undeveloped areas (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Hu, 2002; Nunan, 2003). At the second stage of the English language educational transformation, the central government began collecting the best available teaching resources (for use in large cities) to help in the development of English language teaching. English language education was moved completely out of the primary school levels in rural areas. The syllabus design and policy promoted development in key secondary schools and universities in urban areas. All possible teaching resources were accumulated and redistributed to promote English language teaching and learning efficiency and proficiency in key urban areas. Urban economy is usually more developed than in rural areas, and accordingly, the English language teaching resources are also more abundant. In rural areas, English is taught with very limited resources and less trained teachers (Hu, 2005a). Oral English is almost never a focal skill in rural areas.

During the third stage, there was greater autonomy for English teaching practices in coastal cities, because the economy in coastal cities was better developed due to the advantageous locations for world trade (Hu, 2003, 2005b). In these cities, students have more opportunity to apply oral English through intercultural exchange activities; in rural

areas, students rarely have the need to communicate with anybody in English. In the last decade, the central government has begun to address the economic development differences between rural and urban areas in its attempt to bridge the ever-growing gap (Hu, 2003). In addition, China has entered the age of information with the Internet easily available to any who care to access it. The distribution of teaching resources has broadened, and it is easier than ever to acquire needed information.

Because the test-orientation tendency is prevalent all over the country, students get enough training in terms of reading, writing, and listening; these skills are included in the test. The teaching quality differences, basically, exist in students' oral English communicative competence training. In China, 56% of the population resides in rural areas ("Guojia Tongjiju", 2007, para.1); in universities, students coming from rural areas are increasing every year ("Xuefei Anggui", n.d., para.5). Most students have never had oral English training before. In phase one of my dissertation study, of the 39 students I interviewed, only seven said they had some kind of oral English training prior to college. Most students replied that reading textbooks and articles were their main source of English language training. Poor secondary school training of oral English causes difficulties for students' development of oral English at the college level.

Developing English education purposes. Third, along with Chinese economic development, the purpose of English education had gone through radical changes. From 1978 until 1986, the purpose of English education was mainly preparing students to read, write and translate English messages, so they could learn international science and technology to serve for national modernization (Grabe & Mahon, 1983; Wang, 2008). A "utilitarian orientation" (Hu, 2005a, p. 8) toward English education was prevalent before

1987. With a more open attitude toward the world and a firmer attitude towards developing the national economy and enhancing international corporations, English education in China gradually began to focus on learners' communicative competence. From 1987 till the present, more modern language methodologies have been introduced into Chinese classrooms. English education in China has further emphasized English communicative competence training.

After reviewing the four stages of English education in China, and discussing the shifting policies from 1978 to present, I have demonstrated that the purpose of the current English language teaching policy is to develop learners' communicative competence. However, "test-orientated" English language teaching methods, the gap between rural and urban areas, and the large student population can all cause difficulties with the development of Chinese college students' oral English communicative competence.

English Language Teaching at College Level

After a decade of teaching EFL, I have looked back to see the effects of the constant influence of various educational and institutional policies. Attempting to incorporate the many points of view of administrators, language learners and language teachers, from a university where I worked for ten years, I have reviewed my teaching experience hoping to present my readers with a context for English teaching in China at the college level.

Administrators at the university. During the ten years of my teaching career, I experienced several reforms implemented by the school's administrators. The first two years I taught students who were entirely of the same major and they normally took all their courses together. Naturally, they knew each other very well and had strong social

connections within their class. My department (Foreign Language) was responsible for the entire curriculum of English teaching at the university. Teachers and students got along very well, and students trusted teachers and showed respect and cooperation in the classroom.

Four years later, the administrators decided that teaching all the same majors as a class did not encourage the better students to learn more advanced knowledge while, at the same time, students who were weaker could not catch up with the normal pace of teaching. As a result, the school began a program of mixing students from different majors in an attempt to level the range of abilities within a given class. Mixing students from different majors only benefited a small number of students, but severely disrupted the social interactions that had proven so useful before. The university started using placement tests for incoming freshmen to divide students into different levels of ability. The same year (2002) this new program began, student enrollment increased dramatically, but there was a shortage of new teachers. The university had to increase the number of students per classroom, yet again. After the placement tests, around 60 students with similar English levels, but from different majors, typically formed one normal class. The new classes only met for 90 minutes twice a week, which made it difficult for students to get to know each other and to learn how to cooperate in class activities. Furthermore, homework assignments that required group work were made more difficult, because students could not easily find common free time to practice together. Previously, students of a matched group would have had free time together, so group practice was not difficult to achieve. Teachers had to discontinue this kind of group homework and exercises. The reform did not bring any improvement to English teaching at the university; however, it

did cause difficulties for students and teachers. The limited class time could only be used to enhance grammar and vocabulary learning, and memorization of reading passages. Students showed little interest in participating in class activities that involved speaking and listening. Some students complained that they did not want to waste time listening to strangers speaking non-standard English.

A short time later, the phenomenon of “Dumb English” in China became a very hot topic. The administration noticed that a lot of students could not even clearly introduce themselves in English after eight years of taking courses. Administrators began to transfer part of their focus from reading and writing to speaking and listening training. All students were given two more periods per week especially for practicing their oral English. Teachers were instructed to emphasize students’ oral English training in the classroom as well. At the same time, English teachers received more complaints from other teachers because of the “noise” coming from their classrooms. Many teachers and administrators, outside of the Foreign Language department, thought it was easy for English teachers to teach English. In their eyes, the English teacher’s job was just leading students in games, playing English songs and showing them English movies. They felt anyone was qualified to do this job, but I was happy to see the change. My students began to really use the language they had been learning for so many years. Through different activities, English songs and movies, they learned more and more about Western cultures. In addition to language knowledge, they began to learn through “discourse,” that is: “forms of life which integrates words, acts, values, beliefs attitudes and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes” (Gee, 1996, p. 127).

Regrettably, the administrators once again changed their policy. They hoped to see a higher passing rate for CET-4 (College English Testing Level 4), which is required for students to graduate. Now we were asked to make the CET-4 a priority; we were to help as many students as possible to pass the test. Because of the connection between the degree and the test, students did not want to spend time on English speaking practice, since CET-4 did not test for oral ability. We were back to the old track. Most classes, many with over 70 students, were preparing only for passing the test. Now the job was all about explanation, translation and correction. Most of the time in class, I was the only one to speak English. It seemed class size did not matter anymore.

Language learners. Most Chinese students have had six years of English grammar before they enter university. But the purpose for learning English in secondary school is simply to prepare for the university entrance examination, so only two of the four skills have been developed, reading and writing. Most of my students could read and write college-level English articles, such as contrast and comparison style articles, small English stories and conversations without too much trouble, but they could not speak or understand English spoken to them very well, if at all.

Vygotsky's (1987) sociocultural theory underscores the essential role of social interaction in language development. Gee (2001) points out that "reading and writing cannot be separated from speaking, listening and interacting" (p. 714), because discourse integrates ways of how to act, talk and write (Gee, 1996). Most of my students learned English without benefit of using the language in social interaction. They learned English in an analytical way. They were taught to analyze the grammatical structure of a sentence, find the topic sentence of a passage and classify the methods the writers used to develop

their articles. They were tested by choosing appropriate prepositions of a verb phrase, telling the differences between antonyms and synonyms and so on. Their language testing was basically done through multiple choice questions, ignoring speaking and listening skills altogether.

As a result, my students' English reading and writing were mainly for the purpose of passing written tests. Readings in English literature were supposed to promote students' interest and joy of reading, and provide them with a chance to become familiar with the target language. However, the major reading course "Intensive Reading" is neither interesting nor pleasant, mainly "consisting of a line by line syntactic analysis of literary excerpts" (Garbe & Mahon, 1983, p. 52). In addition, the readings could not bring into play the beneficial aspects of live social interaction, and most readings were so far out of date that there was little relation to current English speaking cultures. Usually students' written assignments were divided into three parts: a positive aspect of a social phenomenon, a negative aspect of a social phenomenon, and then the student's opinions. The standard for correcting the writing was based simply on word usage and sentence structure, because content for all students was similar. It was never pleasant for me to correct students' writing while teaching in China. There were far too many papers to correct, each paper with basically the same content, seldom anything creative or different.

As far as speaking and listening skills were concerned, speaking was never a part of the test plan. It is truly a great challenge for Chinese administrators to organize thousands of students for speaking tests, while maintaining fair conditions for everyone. More importantly, such testing is a great deal more expensive to conduct. Taken together, this meant that oral-language testing was restricted to language majors only. Listening

testing was included in the test for all majors once the technology was acquired. In multi-media classrooms, radio, recorders and computers made it possible and easier to test large numbers of students for listening ability. Listening provided some possibility for students to learn English through socialization. They could learn and discuss how Western cultures use their language in daily life. Some listening passages described vivid living pictures of the Western world. It was a very good sign that Chinese education administrators had begun to place more emphasis on testing listening ability; the curriculum began to improve. However, the need for students to socialize with target language cultures while learning a second language was still an alien concept for the school's administrators. Clearly, it must fall to the educator to change students' test-oriented ways of learning a language and instead help them to become more socially interactive in their learning process. The testing process cannot be allowed to stifle the emerging communicative abilities of the students.

Rueda, Gallego and Moll (2000) reviewed Rogoff's (1995) discussion of three levels of learning and development: the personal plane, the interpersonal or social plane, and the community or institutional plane and elaborated their understandings of these three levels. They argued that the personal plane involves "individual cognition, emotion, behavior, values and beliefs" (p. 71). In China, it is very common to see over 40 students in one class, even oral English classes. Large numbers of diverse students also brought teaching challenges to EFL teachers. Although most students belong to the Han majority, they are from many different provinces within the country. Without speaking standard Mandarin, students and teachers at times cannot understand each other due to the many dialects found throughout China. Each student bears the characteristics and customs of

his or her home province, city or town. It is very challenging for a language teacher to know and understand every student's emotional state or preference in the classroom. It is also difficult for the teacher to monitor more than forty students' behavior simultaneously. There is one thing in common for most students in China: even at the university, though most of them are over eighteen, they still treat teachers as the absolute authority in the classroom. Because of this they are familiar with "normal" methods of knowledge transmission and are willing to sit in the classroom and accept whatever the teacher instructs them in. Preferring to listen to a lecture and take notes, most would feel they wasted time and learned nothing if they were involved in too much interactive classroom activity.

The interpersonal or social plane includes: "communication; role performances; dialogue; cooperation; conflict; assistance and assessment" (Rueda, Gallego & Moll, 2000, p. 71). Team work activities allow for social coordination and collaboration and are a process in which participants acquire knowledge through co-participating, co-organizing and co-problem solving (Gutierrez, Baquedano-López, Alvarez & Chiu, 1999). The practical situation is that Chinese university classes are often two 45-50 minute periods. There are only 90-100 minutes available for at least 40 students per class, each student can only speak for a maximum of two minutes, if they speak by turns and nothing interrupts the flow of the course. However, teachers have to take attendance, give explicit instruction at the beginning of the class, and organize students into activity groups. If the teacher wants to give feedback to every group, she or he has to cut down the very limited and precious time allowed for students to practice. As a result, because of the short time involved per student, most students will just use the time to relax or prepare for their next

class. Reflecting on the teaching difficulties that I have experienced so far, I believe that group work should be highly recommended for such big sized classes. Teachers' instruction guidance and evaluations can also be facilitated with modern technology, such as emails and Skype.

Most students in China have had very similar experiences regarding the community and institutional plane, which involves "shared history, languages, values, beliefs and identities" (Rueda, Gallego & Moll, 2000, p. 71). Although students' characteristics vary, most students share similar community histories and hold similar values and beliefs about education. Students usually stress the value of education. They believe in the power of educators and tests, and seldom confront or question teachers or administrators (Flowerdew, 1998; Nelson, 1995). According to my ten-year teaching experience, I know many students bear heavy expectations from their parents to gain an education to the best of their ability. Many parents, even from a very poor family, try their best to support their children's education. They want to realize their own dreams through their children. They begin to save money, often from the time their children are born. One of the greatest sources of pride and happiness of Chinese parents come from their children's academic achievements. Most students will try to live up to their parents' expectations because they know how hard their parents must work to support their education (Rao, 2006).

Minority students. Minorities in China are nearly all a result of the conquest of peripheral nations by the Han as China built its empire over the centuries (Hansen, 1999, p. xii-xiii). The Han majority accounts today for roughly 92 percent of China's population. The remaining eight percent is divided into 55 officially recognized

minorities (Gil, 2006; Kormondy, 2012; Lin, 1997). These minorities remain primarily on the Chinese borders as they have for hundreds of years. Because of their location along borders with other countries, Chinese governments throughout the centuries have maintained education for minorities so that minority children will grow to accept Chinese values and develop loyalty to China rather than a neighboring country that may be more linguistically and culturally similar than are the Han (Hansen, 1999, p. xiv).

Current educational policies have placed great emphasize on the education of minorities. Governmental consensus is that the way to truly modernize China is through education, especially education of minorities and the rural Han (Hansen, 1999, p. xii-xiii). Even with the support of the central government, minority students still face educational challenges. Though minority students are allowed to enter university with lower grades, it doesn't necessarily bring them enough benefit to succeed. To make things even more complex, it is also possible to change one's ethnicity by filing the correct document of declaration. Many Han students do so each year so that they may partake of minority privileges (lower scores to enter into university) offered by central and provincial governments. Their explanation is that in their past they had a relative who would be considered a minority in today's Chinese culture (Sautman, 1999). If a student is allowed to enter college but is not fully prepared to do college level work, then that student must struggle to catch up with his or her peers.

Although minority students normally are allowed to enter university with lower test scores than Han students, the quality of education offered them by the government, prior to university entrance, is highly deficient. Most minorities live in places where the economy has not yet developed (Hu & Alsagoff, 2010). Few people want to teach in

these impoverished areas; resources, funding, educational materials and teaching equipment are in constant short supply (Kwong & Xiao, 1989; Lin, 1997; Sautman, 1999; Tsung & Cruickshank, 2009; Wang & Phillion, 2009). Minority students are therefore at a great disadvantage in the competition for college entrance. If they make it through the entrance exam and find enough money to pay tuition, they are still at a disadvantage due to the poor education received in primary and secondary schools in the provinces they are from. One strong motivation for minority students, regarding English language education, is that with the implementation of the “Reform and Opening up” policies, their hometowns often become tourist spots; being able to do business as tour guides for international tourists is a strong motivator for them to develop their oral English (Gil, 2006).

Language teachers. From my observations, in most classrooms, Chinese EFL teachers start teaching by explaining the meaning of vocabulary and making sentences of them; students are required to analyze English sentences, so they can write the correct sentences themselves. The most common way to evaluate language learning is to check whether students pass the written exams or not; the most important aspect, in an administrator’s viewpoint, is to evaluate the teacher’s job by looking at the passing rate of each student’s score section.

In China, most students are used to the big size of the classes, and most of them respect the teacher’s authority. As a language teacher, this is an advantage. Usually students will do what the teachers ask. The most important step is for the teachers to set up effective activities for the students so that more students are interacting with their fellow classmates. Also, stimulating students’ motivation and interest to learn and

practice outside of the classroom is invaluable to good progress, especially in oversized classes. Urzua (1989) argues that if activities are designed that allow learners to talk about their own intentions, they have their purpose for acquisition. All too often, the activities we used were not related to a student's interest. I heard complaints, many times, coming from my students, such as: "This topic is so meaningless; I couldn't elaborate in my own language so how can I talk about it in a second language." It was obvious that there was no connection between students' needs and motivations, and the language they were supposed to be learning. The students could not find an interesting way to express or use the new language they had been trying to learn. In China, my students actually had a lot of interest and motivation to learn a second language when they first entered university. However, because of the lack of social interaction using the target language, their enthusiasm gradually decreased. As an English language teacher in China or anywhere else, we should offer the reality of the English-speaking world as much as possible. In this way, when students are practicing their second language, they can feel the need to use the language in a personal way. They may someday, given the right job position, find it necessary to be able to express themselves appropriately when speaking with people from an English speaking culture.

Reviewing my own teaching history, I state that administrator's variable policies, the rote teaching of EFL teachers and the rote learning of Chinese students were dedicated to the purpose of passing English written tests. The diversity and large number of students cause challenges for EFL teachers' instruction and students' oral English social interactions, and therefore caused difficulties for students to develop their oral English communicative competence.

Research Questions

In most Chinese colleges, during the first two years, all students are required to take oral English courses. Having little oral English training at the secondary level, most students face oral English learning challenges. Meanwhile, with the development of the Chinese economy and globalization, college students need to develop their oral communicative competence in English so that they can face the requirements of international business, trade and cooperation that a growing Chinese economy demands. College students face both academic and career requirements to develop their oral English communicative competence.

There are many problems creating difficulties for college students who are trying to develop their oral communicative competence. After reviewing the shifting policies of EFL teaching in China and reflecting on my ten years of teaching experience, I summarized the problems as “test-orientated EFL teaching and learning”, “the learning gap between rural, urban and minority areas in terms of students’ oral English development at the secondary level” and, of course, “the oversized classes trying to learn in a non-English speaking environment.” Test-oriented EFL teaching and learning, forces students at the secondary level to focus on written tests, causing them to ignore oral English learning. Therefore, on entering college, students normally have only a beginning level of oral English communicative competence. In addition, test-oriented EFL teaching influences current oral English pedagogy, because of the rote learning process used, and so most students are passive learners in their oral English development. The learning gap between rural, urban and minority students, in terms of students’ oral English development at the secondary level, brings challenges for EFL instructors to apply

appropriate communicative activities sufficient to meet most students' learning expectations. Naturally enough, oversized classes learning EFL in a non-English speaking environment always make students' oral English practice time and opportunities limited and precious. Taken together, these difficulties prevent students from developing oral communicative competence and therefore there is a need to research effective EFL oral instruction, under the conditions stated, to help students develop oral communicative competence to meet both their academic and career requirements.

For this dissertation, I will use Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as my theoretical foundation, which advocates social interaction for human development and language development. I will apply collaborative, communication-oriented pedagogy for the purpose of promoting students' social interactions in an EFL environment. From a cognitive and sociocultural perspective, I will look into students' social interaction characteristics in a communicative approach oral English class. Students' oral English communicative competence development is my ultimate concern; I will also use Canale and Swain's (1980) communicative competence framework, which includes grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competence, to assess whether students develop oral communicative competence throughout my research and how. Realizing that students from different regions of China have different degrees of oral English learning from their secondary education, I intend to compare students' perspectives on the application of collaborative communicative pedagogy as it affects students from rural versus urban areas and minority students, as a part of my research.

My research question is: What happens when a collaborative, communication-oriented pedagogy is applied in a large-sized oral English class within a Chinese university EFL environment? My sub-questions are:

- How can I structure my teaching in an EFL environment to apply collaborative, communication-oriented pedagogy to realize students' oral English social interactions?
- How do students negotiate meaning when they socially interact in a communicative approach class?
- How do students collaborate in their oral English learning process within a communicative approach class?
- Do students develop oral communicative competence in a communicative approach class, and, if so: how do students develop oral communicative competence in an EFL environment?
- How do students with diverse backgrounds (rural, urban and minority) experience and respond to collaborative, communication-oriented oral English activities?

Summary

In this chapter, I first discussed the shifting policies of EFL teaching in China from 1978 until the present. Looking back at my own ten-year teaching history, I presented an overview of administrators', EFL learners' and teachers' performances regarding EFL learning and teaching. Combining my literature review of Chinese EFL policies and my own history as an EFL teacher, I found several problems with oral English teaching at the college level as well as the secondary level. Facing academic and career requirements, college students need effective EFL oral instruction to develop their

communicative competence. I raised my research questions to meet my research purposes: contributing to EFL oral instruction in an essential approach that can benefit students in large-sized classes to develop communicative competence in an EFL environment and investigating how second language learners develop their oral communicative competence through their social interactions.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In Chapter One, I explained since 1978, traditional EFL teaching in China has focused mainly on written tests, while students' oral English development has been largely ignored. At the college level, students face the challenge of developing oral English competence to meet the requirements of their future careers. In order to examine how collaborative communication-oriented pedagogy works on students' oral English competence in a non-English speaking environment, I apply Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as my theoretical foundation. Additionally, I take into consideration students' social interaction process from a cognitive and sociocultural perspective. Ultimately, I will assess students' oral communicative competence development. Accordingly, my literature review includes three major parts: Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, the cognitive perspective of social interaction as it relates to meaning negotiation and literature concerning communicative competence.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

In this section, I review Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, including social interaction and human mental development, cultural aspects of social interaction, the ZPD concept, and characteristics of oral speech.

Social interaction and human mental development. Vygotsky (1978) writes:

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the

formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals. (p. 57)

He adds that in “the general transition from inter-mental functions to intra-mental functions, one aspect of the transition from the child’s social and collective activity to his individual mental functions... constitutes the general law of development of all higher mental functions” (1987, p. 259). This general law emphasizes the primacy of social interaction on human mental development. In describing the general law of human mental development, Vygotsky unites the material and mental sources for human development (Lantolf, 1994; Lantolf & Throne, 2006; Mahn, 2012) and treats individuals as active learners (Lantolf & Throne, 2006; Rogoff, 1990; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

Various writers present their understandings of Vygotsky’s general law of human mental development. Lantolf (1994) argues that when children start to conduct certain “culturally defined” (p. 419) tasks through social interactions with other individuals who can guide them, they are appropriating “symbolic mediated mental functions” (p. 419). At the beginning, individuals who offer guidance bear the most responsibility for conducting the tasks. With the passing of time, children begin to share more of the responsibility for conducting the task by applying their own mental capabilities. Normally, children will eventually conduct the task without other’s guidance. The whole process is described by Lantolf (1994) below:

At the outset of ontogenesis, conscious mental activity is distributed and jointly constructed in the dialogic interactions that arise between children and representatives of the culture. As children participate in these collaborative interactions, they appropriate for themselves the patterns of

planning, attending thinking, remembering etc. that the culture through its representative's values. Hence, what is at one point socially mediated mental processing evolves into self-mediating processing. (p. 419)

Finally, Lantolf (2007) concludes that "Vygotsky's argument is that specifically human mental development activity emerges as a result of the internalization of social relationships, culturally organized activity and symbolic artifacts, in particular language" (p. 31).

Rogoff (1995) asserts her understanding of the importance of the interpsychological level for human mental development and writes:

For Vygotsky (1978, 1987), children's cognitive development had to be understood as taking place through their interaction with other members of society who are more conversant with society's intellectual practices and tools (especially language) for mediating intellectual activity made possible, or constrained by others, whether or not they are in each other's presence or even know of each other's existence. (p. 141)

She concludes that the first stage of human mental development, the interpersonal plane of sociocultural activities, is made up of individuals' social interaction with others and some form of material engagement.

In Vygotsky's general law of human mental development: "internalization" is "the process by which social becomes psychological" (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p. 29). Lantolf and Throne (2006) regard Vygotsky's concept of "internalization" as the individual's gradual "independence from specific concrete circumstance" (p. 159) through social activities. They assert that after gaining a certain degree of independence,

individuals keep on depending on available mediational means. The mediational resources are generally “derived from socioculturally organized concepts, artifacts and activities” (p.159). As a result, human performance can always be traced to its social origins, even when looking at a single individual.

From the perspective of Vygotsky’s “genetic approach” (p. 194) which focuses on “interconnectedness” (p. 194) of phenomenon and looking at the origins of phenomena (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996), Wells (1999) presents his understanding of social interaction for human mental development. He argues that:

Human beings are not limited to their biological inheritance, as other species are, but are born into an environment that is shaped by the activities of previous generations. In this environment they are surrounded by artifacts that carry the past into the present (Cole, 1996), and by mastering the use of these artifacts and the practice in which they are employed, they are able to ‘assimilate the experiences of human kind’ (Leont’ev, 1981, p. 55). In other words, to the biological inheritance carried in the genes is added the cultural inheritance carried in the meaning of artifacts and practices in the individual’s environment. Human development is thus not simply a matter of biological maturation; it is immeasurably enriched and extended through the individual’s appropriation and mastery of the cultural inheritance as this is encountered in activity and interaction with others. (p. 54)

Vygotsky’s explanation of the development of scientific and spontaneous concepts in children also implies the role of social interaction in general human mental

development. He (1987) explains how children develop both spontaneous and scientific concepts:

The birth of the spontaneous concept is usually associated with the child's immediate encounter with things, things that are often explained by adults but are nonetheless real things....in contrast, the birth of the scientific concept begins not with an immediate encounter with things, but with a mediated relationship to the object. With the spontaneous concept, the child moves from the thing to the concept. With the scientific concept, he is forced to follow the opposite path—from the concept to the thing. (p. 219)

Wertsch argues that according to Vygotsky, “the relationship between sign and object is fundamental to understanding how children's spontaneous concepts differ from scientific concepts” (Wertsch, 2000, p. 20). Children's spontaneous concept development is usually related to directly encountering objects. Children conduct social interactions with others in order to get to know objects that they encounter, while children's scientific concepts usually start with social interaction through mediation tools. After they develop scientific concepts, children can move from the concept to the object (Rogoff, 1990; Wertsch, 2000). Neither spontaneous concept nor scientific concept can happen without children's social interactions with other people (Wertsch, 2000).

Empirical studies support the role of social interaction for human mental development. Neo (2003) conducted a study using web-based projects to involve learners' social interaction and collaboration to observe learners' problem-solving and critical-thinking skills. This researcher asked students, working as groups, to design a website for which everyone had to contribute to the design effort. From the project results

and the students' attitude survey and feedback, the research results indicated that students had very positive attitudes towards their collaborative learning; they developed an understanding of computer tools; they learned how to work with classmates to compromise over conflicts; and they found that collaborative learning enhanced their problem solving and critical thinking abilities. Neo concluded that "students learned better when there is social interaction among the peers and there is sharing of information and knowledge" (p. 470-471).

In the 1980s, Wong Fillmore (1985) conducted a three-year empirical study to research individual differences in second language learning. She discovers the importance of students' involvement, and participation in the class, for their second language development. She claims that "in order to learn a new language, learners have to be in a position to engage in interactions with speakers in a variety of social situations" (p. 27). Wong Fillmore explains that through social interaction, learners will have an opportunity to observe how the new language is structured and how it is used in socially appropriate communication.

Social interaction and language development. Language development, as a form of human mental development, also requires social resources (John-Steiner, 2007). Language is originated in an individual's interactions with others (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), and enables humans to "organize and maintain control over the self and its mental, and even physical, activity" (Lantolf, 1994, p. 418). John-Steiner and Mahn (1996) explain that the start of children's development begins with the social interaction of children with their caregivers. Through social interaction with adults or companions, children internalize effective strategies and knowledge. John-Steiner and Mahn (1996)

conclude that the relationship between human beings “forms a basis for cognitive and linguistic mastery” (p. 192). In another article, John-Steiner, Meehan, and Mahn (1998) once again state that language “as a continuous dynamic system” can “ensure communicative effectiveness” and is constantly “developing in historically, socially, and interpersonally changing contexts” (p. 129). They explain in detail how children learn their first language. Their argument focus on how social communication between children and adults is necessary for first language acquisition. By being immersed in communicative experiences with adults, children develop language fluency without being aware of the explicit grammar rules. The development of the language process for immature speakers involves “the construction of a functional language system-the slow and complex interweaving of external and internal, auditory and vocal, verbal and non verbal, cultural and familial, and physiological and psychological systems” (John-Steiner, Meehan, & Mahn, 1998, p. 130).

Hasen (2002) explains the social resource for language development from the perspective of discourse. He argues that “discourse is ubiquitous in the living of social life”, and that “semiotic mediation occurs wherever discourse occurs” (p. 113). An important role of language is to enable individuals to internalize what they have experienced in their lives through the social interactions of communication. From this point of view, Hasen concludes that we see that the source of language development is the world around us.

Using Vygotsky’s sociocultural approach, Foster and Ohta (2005) assert their understanding of language development:

Language development is essentially a social process. These [sociocultural] approaches view mind as distributed and learning as something inter-mental, embedded in social interaction. This means that individuals and environments mutually constitute one another and persons are not considered to be separable from environments and interactions through which language development occurs. (p. 403)

When Wong Fillmore and Fillmore (2012) discuss English learner and language minority students' language learning, they state the importance of social interaction between those learners and the target language speakers, writing that "ordinarily, language learning happens when learners come into close and frequent contact with speakers of the target language, and efforts are made by both learners and target language speakers to communicate by use of that language" (p. 65).

Many empirical studies support social interactions as playing a role in learner's language development. Gibbons (2003) investigated how teacher and students' social interactions, in a science classroom, contributed to students' language development. In her study, nine and ten year old students had to take a science class using English as their second language. English was used as both a learning target and the mediation language for science knowledge. Gibbons argued that social interaction, which has been proved to facilitate students' second language development, involved both teachers' and students' active engagement in the co-construction of language and science knowledge. Gibbons found that the teacher's active engagement with student social interactions included "mode shifting through recasting, signaling to learners how to reformulate, indicating the need for reformulation and recontextualising personal knowledge" (p. 257). Teachers'

recasting built upon what students have contributed and included teacher's recoding of students' contributions and the repeating of messages; teachers' signaling for reformulation assisted learners to actively confront communication difficulties and do self-corrections. As a learning check, the teacher encouraged students to produce their understanding of the topic in a more abstract way, independent of "here and now" contexts. Gibbons' study indicated that through teachers' and students' active engagement in classroom social interactions, students gradually develop their second language using school curriculum subject knowledge.

A study done by Donato (1994) showed that group work was beneficial for students' social interaction in their second language. Donato observed a group of three second language (L2) students working together as a team over the course of ten weeks. His research findings showed that learners' appropriation of linguistic knowledge, from social interaction in a classroom, was a result of the spontaneous scaffolding by peer group interaction. He wrote:

It has been shown that learners are capable of providing guided support to their peers during collaborative L2 interactions in ways analogous to expert scaffolding documented in the developmental psychological literature. The results of this study indicate that scaffolding occurs routinely as students work together on language learning tasks. The effects of this help are substantial enough to redefine and further cultivate the role played by the social context in L2 development. (p. 51)

Taking place in an EFL environment, Imai's (2000) study indicated that group work also promoted learners' emotional communication and benefited their second

language learning. Imai studied how two different groups of university-level Japanese EFL students engaged in out-of-class preparations for oral English presentations, through the use of collaborative group work. The research data showed that while group members were collectively working on the task goal (preparing for oral presentations on assigned reading material), they verbally presented various emotions: confusion, boredom, frustration, regret and so forth. Imai argued that “each of the manifested emotions was not simply a reaction to the members’ perceived objects and events, but the members communicated to each other and formed emotional intersubjectivity” (p. 288). Imai stated that such negotiated emotional intersubjectivity “mediated the group’s collective thinking in a way that transformed the content of the goal, from simply revoicing the ideas of assigned reading material and the teacher’s implicit expectation to critically challenging the content of the text” (p. 288) and learning was “embedded in an interpersonal transaction”(p. 278).

Meaning and sense. Vygotsky’s (1987) discussion of how meaning results from the unity of thinking of speaking indicates the function of social interaction for language development. He writes:

Word meaning is a phenomenon of thinking only to the extent that thought is connected with the word and embodied in it. It is a phenomenon of speech only to the extent that speech is connected with thought and illuminated by it. Word meaning is a phenomenon of verbal thought or of the meaningful word. It is a unity of word and thought. (p. 244)

Vygotsky argues that as children develop their ability to generalize, word meaning also develops (p. 249). As a result, the formation meaning is not static but is a

dynamic process. Vygotsky clarifies his concept of children's meaning making processes by analyzing the role that *sense* plays in its formation:

A word's sense is the aggregate of all psychological facts that arise in our consciousness as result of the word. Sense is a dynamic, fluid and complex formation that has several zones that vary in their stability. Meaning is only one of the zones of the sense that the word acquires in the context of speech. (p. 275-276)

Vygotsky maintains his discussion of the characteristics of sense as he argues the interrelationship of a word's sense and meaning, Vygotsky (1987) explains that a word's sense changes with different contexts. The sense of the word is "inexhaustible" and determined by "everything in consciousness which is related to what the word expresses" (p. 276). Consequently, the sense of a word is unlimited and can never be completed, because it is related to an individual's development in a social context. He states that "the sense of a word depends on one's understanding of the world as a whole and on the internal structure of personality" (p. 276). On the other hand, meaning is relatively stable and "remains constant with all changes of the word's sense that are associated with its use in various contexts" (p. 276). From a lexical perspective alone, a word may have just one meaning. This meaning is realized in living speech and works as a part of the sense of the living speech. Vygotsky writes that "the enrichment of the word through the sense it acquires in context is a basic law of the dynamics of meaning" (p. 276). This means that "the word absorbs intellectual and affective content from the entire context in which it is intertwined" (p. 276). It begins to mean both more or less than its lexical meaning. Vygotsky concludes that:

It means more because the scope of its meaning is expanded. It requires several zones that supplement this new content. It means less because the abstract meaning of the word is restricted and narrowed to what the word designates in this single context. (p. 276)

Mahn and John-Steiner (2002) present their understandings of Vygotsky's theory on the differences between meaning and sense, proposing that meaning is conceptualized as external while sense is related to internal and carries a social aspect. They state that "the individual sense of an utterance includes attributes that are shaped by culture and appropriated through social interaction" (p. 51). The sense appropriation is closely regulated by sociocultural resources. Mahn (2008) explores Vygotsky's theories on meaning and sense in more detail. He writes:

Vygotsky used the term "meaning" in two different but related ways. One refers to the sociocultural meaning that is in existence when an individual is born into a particular social situation. This is tied to the dictionary meaning. His other use of meaning refers to the internal system developed through signs, symbolic representation through language. It is within this system that an individual sense develops. (p. 118)

Mahn (2008) states that "children's systems of meaning continue to expand as they discover relationships between objects and begin to use categories by making generalizations of generalizations" (p. 119). In his latest article, Mahn (2012) states that "there is a level of fluidity in sociocultural meaning ranging from the most fixed, meanings that are coded in the dictionary, to the most fluid, Meaning in Language (7c)-language in specific utterances, written and spoken sign operations in particular situations

of development” (p. 117). Mahn suggests: “Sense (*smysl*) is an important component in the speaking /thinking system with sociocultural meaning as an essential but subordinate part of sense” (p. 118). Mahn (2012) writes:

Sense’s course of development includes: the early trial and error period of syncretic images; the process of thinking in complexes; the development of everyday and scientific concepts; and adolescents’ development of conscious awareness of their own thinking processes-thinking in concepts. There is an ongoing dialectic interaction in this development between the existing, relatively stable, external sociocultural meanings and sense in the speaking/thinking system. (p. 118)

From Vygotsky’ discussions of meaning and sense, children apply generalization to construct meaning and develop meaning by social interaction. The generalization starts with children’s interactions with caretakers (Mahn, 2008).

Cultural aspects of social interactions. John-Steiner and Mahn (1996) point out that Vygotsky’ approach emphasizes the origins and history of phenomenon, and they support that “learning and development take place in socially and culturally shaped contexts. Historical conditions are constantly changing, resulting in changed contexts and opportunities for learning” (p. 195).

Caxton (2002) argues that in looking at students’ learning process it is necessary to bear in mind, not just the individual or small study group, but also the host of socioeconomic, sociocultural and sociopolitical variables that come into play. This host of variables can be thought of broadly as the cultural influence which begins to shape learners’ learning ability, practically from birth. Claxton (2002) states, “even the solitary

mathematician, or the school student struggling with her homework, is learning in the context of, and with the aid of, a host of culturally constituted tools-books, symbols, computer graphics-which afford or invite certain approaches to the learning task, and preclude others” (p. 22). He sees education as “the creation of cultures and contexts within which young people develop the epistemic mentalities and identities characteristic of effective lifelong learners” (p. 27). From this point of view, it can be seen that, internationally, the development process of lifelong learners must vary accordingly. The concepts of being successful, effective, appropriate and necessary will vary wildly from culture to culture.

According to Rogoff (1990), “the particular actions and skills of an individual cannot be understood out of the context of the immediate practical goals being sought and the enveloping sociocultural goals into which they fit” (p. 139). She writes:

Interactions in the zone of proximal development are the crucible of development and of culture, in that they allow children to participate in activities that would be impossible for them alone, using cultural tools that themselves must be adapted to the specific practical activities at hand, and thus both passed on to and transformed by new members of the culture. (p.

16)

Realizing that the cultural aspect of social interaction is important for teaching, Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (1992), in a study about the influence of sociocultural backgrounds on students’ learning, found that the positive inclusion and use of learners’ sociocultural information in the teaching content of the classroom produced highly positive results in student learning efficacy. Students’ background knowledge offered

students opportunities to communicate about their real lives in the classroom. They suggested that teachers should build a “systematical” (p. 139) relationship with students and their parents, because “this relationship can become the basis for the exchange of knowledge about family or school matters, reducing the insularity of classrooms, and contributing to the academic content and lessons” (p. 139).

For the learners from Eastern Asia, Gan (2009) argues that “Eastern/Confucian culture is often perceived as valuing collectivism, conformity and respect for authority” (p. 42) and it impacts on Asian students’ learning attitudes and behavior. Confucian culture generally contains the following principles: “(1) forming a hierarchy society for stability and order, (2) focusing on self-cultivation (long-term-oriented), (3) creating and maintaining a harmonious environment and relation with others and (4) performing virtuous behaviors for humanness” (Chuang, 2012, p. 3). Rao (2006) noted that an important Chinese cultural feature is “collectivism” (p. 494). He investigated 217 university students in Jiangxi Normal University, China, regarding the use of language learning strategies and then interpreted the data from a cultural educational perspective. The results of his study showed that the majority of students used affective strategies (such as self-determination, self-encouragement and will power). He further analyzed the effect of a strong collectivistic orientation and pointed out that such orientation causes Chinese students to attach their success or failure not just to themselves but their families and groups. In order to obtain achievement, Chinese students firmly believed in hard work and effort (Rao, 2006).

Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) conducted a large-scale survey of 387 Taiwanese teachers of English. The survey was to investigate second language teachers’ opinions

and practices regarding motivational strategies. The research found that the teachers attached the least importance to “promoting learner autonomy” (p. 171) as a motivational strategy. Cheng and Dörnyei state that: “The common belief amongst Chinese educators is that the teacher is the ultimate source of knowledge, which he/she has then to transmit to learners” (p. 170); this the teachers’ choice in the survey. As a result of their belief, they a tendency to be skeptical about activities which encourage learner’s autonomy, which allows students to organize their own learning process. Also, they point out that Chinese learners have a tendency to depend on teachers to make decisions for them.

Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) reported that in the actual practice of teaching, “making the learning tasks stimulating” and “familiarizing learners with L2-related culture” (p. 172) are the most underutilized methods available to the teachers. “The test-driven teaching culture and the perception that learning should be serious, hard work” (p. 172) account for the underutilization of such learner oriented skills. Another Chinese writer, Rao (1996) stated a similar opinion about Chinese educators’ attitudes towards “making the learning tasks stimulating”. He states: “Both Chinese learners and teachers are inclined to equate game-like activities, competitions and product-oriented tasks with light-hearted entertainment that yields little pedagogical merits” (p. 459). It seems that in the Chinese educational context involving fantasy and humor with learning activities has a negative implication.

After reviewing the literature regarding social interaction for human mental development and language development, I will review literature regarding the concept of Zone of Proximal Development.

Zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky's ZPD has a compelling influence on researchers and practitioners from a wide range of disciplines (Lantolf & Throne, 2006). Ohta (2000) asserts that Vygotsky's general law of human mental development considers "the transformation of cognitive constructs from the interpsychological to intrapsychological space" (p. 60), while the ZPD, "proposes how this transformation occurs through a process of developmentally sensitive assisted performance" (p. 60). Ohta concludes that "the general law of development and ZPD work hand-in-hand" (p. 75).

Vygotsky (1978) raised the "zone of proximal development" concept while he was discussing the relationship between learning and development. He argues that there are two developmental levels that should be considered: the "actual developmental level" (p. 85) and the "level of potential development" (p. 86). He defines the ZPD as:

The distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86)

Vygotsky analyzes the relationship between learning and development through the concept of ZPD. He unites learning and developmental processes and argues that "learning is not development" (p. 90). Learning creates zones of proximal development. Vygotsky proposes that learning awakes a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when children are interacting with people in their environments and in cooperation with their peers; once these processes are internalized, they become part of children's independent developmental achievement. Therefore, "the

developmental process lags behind the learning process; this sequence then results in zones of proximal development” (p. 90). Vygotsky uses a vivid metaphor to explain the primary feature of the zone of proximal development: ZPD defined learners as being in the process of budding or flowering in their development rather than being the fruit at the end of the developmental process. His concept of ZPD opposes the idea that once children mastered an operation or an activity, their developmental process is completed. On the contrary, he argues that they have just begun their development. He also points out the dynamic relation between development processes and learning processes is highly complex. Vygotsky (1987) writes that:

A central feature for the psychological study of instruction is the analysis of the child’s potential to raise himself to a higher level of development through collaboration, to move from what he has to what he does not have through imitation. (p. 210)

Based on Vygotsky’s ZPD theory, Tharp and Gallimore (1988) explain in detail their suggested four stages of the ZPD.

“Stage I: where performance is assisted by more capable others” (p. 33). They argue that before children can independently work, they depend on more capable adults or peers. The help children need is related to their age and the nature of the task. Children’s understanding begins with social interaction. After children gain some understanding of the task, through language and semiotics, adults or more capable peers can assist them using “questions, feedback and further cognitive structuring” (p. 33), such assistance is called scaffolding. Tharp and Gallimore point out that scaffolding is not aimed just at simplifying the task, but rather is meant to hold the task difficulty constant.

Scaffolding is “simplifying the child’s role by means of graduated assistance from the adult/expert” (p. 33). Therefore, in stage I, adult responsibility for task performance declined; children’s responsibility reciprocally increased and they are not just passive recipients of an adult’s or a more capable peer’s input.

“Stage II: where performance is assisted by the self” (p. 36). They argue that in stage two children perform tasks without another’s assistance, but it doesn’t mean that children fully master control of task performance. In this stage, control of task was passed from adults to children, with children’s overt verbalizations. Tharp and Gallimore explain that according to Vygotsky and his follower Luria, “once children begin to direct or guide behavior with their own speech” (p. 37), they began to guide and direct themselves instead of being guided by others. Once all evidence of self regulation has vanished, “the child has emerged from the ZPD into the developmental stage for the task” (p. 38).

“Stage III: where performance is developed, automatized, and ‘fossilized’” (p. 38). In this stage, children no longer need assistance. Vygotsky (1978) called them “fruits” (p. 86) of development or fossilized development, which Tharp and Gallimore explained as “emphasizing its fixity and distance from the social and mental forces of change” (p. 38).

“Stage IV: where de-automation of performance leads to recursion back through ZPD” (p. 38). Tharp and Gallimore explain that de-automation of performance could be caused by “environment change”, “individual stress” and “major upheaval or physical trauma” (p. 39). They argue that after de-automation, for the purpose of gaining control of the task again, the development process has to be “recursive” (p. 39). The recursive process could be realized in two ways: learners/children retreat to self-regulation by means of self-talking or recalling the assistance; learners/children retreat to other-

regulation with a goal to “re-proceed through assisted performance to self-regulation and to exit the ZPD again into a new automation” (p. 39). Finally, Tharp and Gallimore combine their discussion of the four stages of ZPD and write that “the lifelong learning by any individual is made up of these same regulated, ZPD sequences—from other assistance to self-assistance recurring over and over again for the development of new capacities” (p. 38).

ZPD and education. Tharp and Gallimore (1988) apply the ZPD to education and suggest the concept of “assisted performance” to better define teaching. Tharp and Gallimore (1991) write that “teaching consists in assisting performance through a child’s zone of proximal development (ZPD). Teaching must be redefined as assisted performance: teaching occurs when performance is achieved with assistance” (p. 3). They specifically point out that for the development of forming, expressing and changing ideas in speech and writing, the critical form of assistance is “dialogue” or “instructional conversation” (p. 4), which emphasizes the idea of teachers exploring and sharing ideas and knowledge with students through conversation. They (1991) suggest seven means for assisting performance:

1. Modeling: offering behavior for imitation. Modeling assists by giving the learner information and a remembered image that can serve as a performance standard.
2. Feeding back: providing information on a performance as it compares to a standard. This allows the learners to compare their performance to the standard, and thus allows self-correction.

3. Contingency managing: applying the principles of reinforcement and punishment. In this means of assisting performance, rewards and punishments are arranged to follow on behavior, depending on whether or not the behavior is desired.
4. Directing: requesting specific action. Directing assists by specifying the correct response, providing clarify and information, and promoting decision-making.
5. Questioning: producing a mental operation that the learner cannot or would not produce alone. This interaction assists further by giving the assistor information about the learners' developing understanding.
6. Explaining: providing explanatory and belief structure. This assists learners in organizing and justifying new learning and perceptions.
7. Task structuring: chunking, segregating, sequencing, or otherwise structuring a task into or from components. This modification assists by better fitting the task itself into the zone of proximal development.

(p. 4-5)

Assessment. Applying ZPD concept to education, experts' assessment of learners' learning levels plays an important role in students' learning development (Haneda & Wells, 2010; Horton, 2008; Lantolf & Aljaafreh, 1995; Wells, 2011). Wells (2011) argues that adults or more capable peer's assistance is not preplanned but is contingent on their assessment of "how best to help the child make progress in successfully completing the ongoing activity" (p. 165). Horton (2008) argues that it is critical for teachers to properly assess students' learning, because the potential learning area varies among

learners. Teachers should focus on the gap between learners' actual development and their potential development. Furthermore, the teacher must take the level of difficulty into consideration. If the teaching is too easy or too difficult, learners will lose interest or get frustrated in learning, not to mention mastery of the new knowledge.

Lantolf and Aljaafreh (1995) raise the concept of "dialogic interaction" to emphasize the dynamics of experts' assessment in social interaction between learner and expert. They write: "The learner and expert engage each other in an attempt to discover precisely what the learner is able to achieve without help and what the learner can accomplish with assistance, or regulation, from the expert" (p. 620). They argue that to assimilate information through feedback, it is necessary for a learner to be within their "zone of proximal development". In this manner, it is possible for L2 learners to gain from feedback response, learning from a slightly more expert other, thus moving further along through their ZPD, not from a true expert, but rather through social interaction with a slightly more competent peer.

Collaboration. Rogoff (1990) puts forward the concept of "guided participation" (p. 8), suggesting that both social guidance and children's participation in various cultural activities were crucial for children's cognitive development. She (1990) suggests the concept of guided participation as a focus on the "intersubjectivity" (p. 8) underlying the guided participation process, which emphasizes the sharing of social relationships between people who offer guidance to learners.

Ball and Wells (2009) argue that Vygotsky's ZPD treats learning as the co-construction of knowledge between novices and experts. Dialogical talk is the mediation within collaborative work (Wells, 1999, 2000). Ball and Wells (2009) assert that

classroom communities should start a “dialogue” (p. 18) between teachers and learners.

Haneda and Wells (2010) suggest that there are five conditions that engage learners and teachers in a productive dialogue in class, including:

- The class engages in a shared inquiry, which may be initiated by any member of the community.
- The topic under discussion is, or becomes, of interest to the participants, where interest is most likely to be generated when the discussion bears on a future action to be carried out or on an ‘object’ that participants are constructing or trying to improve.
- Individuals are encouraged to contribute opinions, suggestions, observations, or experiences that they want to share and believe to be related to the activity in progress.
- Others are willing to listen attentively and critically and respond in ways that attempt to advance collective understanding.
- While the teacher has overall responsibility for the activity, direction of the dialogue and evaluation of the contribution are shared by all participants. (p. 13)

Collaboration also involves peers’ efforts. Horton (2008) in his discussion of Vygotsky’s ZPD, emphasizes the interaction and cooperation between peers because “students and peers all help bring forth knowledge, rather than the professor solely creating or implanting it” (p. 16). Ohta (2000) also studied peers’ collaborations and asserted that “the provision of developmentally appropriate assistance is not only dependent upon attention to what the peer interlocutor is able to do, but also upon

sensitivity to the partners' readiness for help, which is communication through subtle interactional cues" (p. 53).

Learner's motivation. Mahn and John-Steiner (2002), claim that understanding affective factors in learning deepens the understanding of Vygotsky's ZPD concept. They state that ZPD is "a complex whole, a system of systems in which the interrelated and interdependent elements include the participants, artifacts and environment/context and the participants' experience of their interactions with it" (p. 49). They assert the complementarity between these elements plays a role in ZPD construction, and write that "when a breach in this complementarity occurs because the cognitive demands are too far beyond the learner's ability or because negative affective factors, such as fear or anxiety are present, the zone in which effective teaching/learning occurs is diminished" (p. 49). On the other hand, in the ZPD, "careful listening, intense dialogue and emotional supports" (p. 51) of the social interactions between learners and experts, and between partners, maintains their co-construction of the "understanding, of scientific discovery and of artistic forms" (p. 51). They suggest a term, "emotional scaffolding" (p. 52), and claim that "emotional scaffolding includes the gift of confidence, the sharing of risks in the presentation of new ideas, constructive criticism, and the creation of a safety zone" (p. 52). In congruence with Vygotsky's thinking, they conclude that partners collaboratively create a zone of proximal development for each other "where intellect and affect are fused in a unified whole" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 373).

Cook (1999) conducted a study to promote second language learners' positive emotions in the learning process. He suggests that real communication also includes second language learners' (L2) actual language usage. He argues that teachers should

bring more “L2 user situations and roles” (p. 185) into classroom activities instead of solely focusing on native language resources. Recognition of L2 users’ language resources can convince students of “the benefits of learning an L2” (p. 204) allowing them to see that L2 users are “standing between two worlds and two cultures” (p. 204). Setting L2 users as role models can convince students that they are “successful multicompetent speakers not failed native speakers” (p. 204). Cook suggests that in the practice of second language teaching, teachers should “present students with examples of the language of L2 users and of the language addressed to L2 users” (p. 198), such as an English language newspaper from Malaysia or Chile. Finally, Cook concludes that “making some parts of language teaching reflect an L2 user target world would at least show students that successful L2 users exist in their own right and are not just pale shadows of native speakers” (p. 200).

After reviewing many studies (Clément & Kruidenier, 1983; Gardner & Lambert, 1959, 1972; Gardner, 1985; Gardner, Day & MacIntyre, 1992; Giles & Byrne, 1982; Tremblay & Gardener, 1995), regarding motivation, Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) conceptualize seven components of L2 motivation.

1. Integrativeness which looks at “reflecting a positive outlook on the L2 and its culture, to the extent that learners scoring high on this factor may want to integrate themselves into the L2 culture and become similar to the L2 speakers” (p. 20).
2. Instrumentality refers “to the perceived pragmatic benefits of L2 proficiency and reflects the recognition that for many language learners is the usefulness of L2 proficiency that provides the greatest driving force” (p. 21).

3. Attitudes toward L2 speakers and community refer to attitudes about having direct contact with L2 speakers and community.
4. Cultural interest. It reflects “the appreciation of cultural products associated with the particular L2 and conveyed by media (e. g., films, videos, TV programs, pop music, magazines and books)” (p. 21).
5. Vitality of the L2 community concerns “the perceived importance and wealth of the L2 communities in question” (p. 21-22). Csizér and Dörnyei summarize vitality as being determined by three sociocultural factors: “status factors (economic, political and social, etc.), demographic factors (size and distribution of the group) and institutional support factors (representation of the ethnic group in the media, education, government, etc.” (p. 22).
6. Milieu refers to “the social influences stemming from the immediate environment” (p. 22). The perceived influence is from parents, family, and friends.
7. Linguistic self-confidence refers to “a confident, anxiety-free belief that the mastery of a L2 is well within their learner’s means” (p. 22).

Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) discuss the interrelationship between motivational components. They state that instrumentality complements integrativeness. Instrumentality can be divided into two types: internalized instrumental motives, which are closely related to learners’ integrativeness and therefore promote learning effort significantly, and non internalized instrumental motives which are generated by “a mere sense of duty or a fear of punishment” and “are more likely to be short-term without providing the sustained commitment that the successful mastery of a L2 requires” (p. 29). In their conclusion, they state that: “Integrativeness is a central factor in the L2 motivation

construct because most of the impact of the other motivational variables was mediated through the direct and strong link between Integrativeness and the criterion measures” (p. 30).

In Japan, Yashima (2002) conducted research to investigate how students’ “willingness to communicate” (WTC) and international postures can affect their face-to-face oral communications. Yashima included 377 Japanese freshmen in the research, with findings indicating that students with a strong international posture and “a general attitude toward the international community” directly influence their WTC in second language learning. Yashima explained that: “The more internationally oriented an individual was the more willing he or she was to communicate in English” (p. 62). An individual’s stronger WTC indicated that they were more motivated in learning English, which, in turn, “contributes to proficiency and confidence in L2 communication” (p. 62). Yashima further explained that, in a foreign language environment, students’ international posture was fostered by the learning materials they encounter and or their life experience. This suggested that in order to encourage students’ international posture and WTC, EFL classes should be “designed to enhance students’ interest in different cultures and international affairs and activities, as well as to reduce anxiety and build confidence in communication” (Yashima, 2000, p. 63).

ZPD and second language development. In the field of second language development, many studies have referenced the ZPD concept. Compernelle and Williams (2012) conducted a study, using “instructional conversation” (p. 43) that suggested that “teacher and students alike are responsible for co-creating connected discourse, influencing the selection of speakers turns, and the like” (p. 43), to help learners

understand L2 (French) variations from English. The result showed that the instructional conversation model was conducive to learner's "deeper, more conceptually based understandings of language variations in French" (p. 54). In the end, they concluded that "teacher-students collaborative interactions" had the potential for learners to develop an understanding of language variations and thus promote sociolinguistic competence.

Tocalli-Beller and Swain (2007) studied how peer-to-peer social interaction, in working on puns and riddles, facilitates learners' second language learning. They stated that Vygotsky emphasizes play in child development. Tocalli-Beller and Swain applied puns and riddles in a second language classroom and arranged for international graduate students of various backgrounds to work in pairs and trios to unravel the meanings of second language puns and riddles. They stated that the peer-to-peer social interactions were the students' "problem-solving and knowledge-building dialogues" (p. 165). They found that, through peer-peer second language social interaction, students were able to talk with each other sharing their previous knowledge and providing feedback for each other's responses. As a result, students were able to get the key word meanings and understand the basic humor of the second language puns and riddles.

Working in an EFL environment, Chiu (2005) suggests a few teaching strategies regarding writing in a second language using ZPD as a theoretical framework. The first strategy is "building up my students' confidence" (Chiu, 2005, p. 239). In the second language learning process, the cooperation and group work between Chiu and her students lowered individual risk taking, allowing students to gradually gain confidence and enabling them to share as individuals within her class. In her second strategy, "modeling techniques" (Chiu, 2005, p. 240), students have a better chance to observe and

modify how the new language is used. The third strategy looks at “peers’ help” (Chiu, 2005, p. 241) as sometimes being more useful than teacher’s help. Through frequent interactions between students, peer cooperation can often solve a problem. This “learner-centered” approach can also help the teacher to clearly realize students’ actual difficulties and apply the appropriate teaching strategies to improve their learning.

Jones (2006) examined 68 students of French language to determine whether or not certain types of peer collaborative situations would benefit the learning of a second language. Divided into four groups of students, each group was assigned to a different learning situation. One group was given no annotations and students were to study alone, individually. Another group had no annotations but was allowed to study in pairs. A third group was given written and pictorial annotations with students studying solo, while the fourth group studied in pairs with written and pictorial annotations. In this multimedia approach to L2 learning an assortment of media may be used, such as pictures, written or spoken language, diagrams, animation, video and any other means for conveying information from one person to another. Meaningful interaction with the target language was facilitated by providing meaningful input and thereby eliciting meaningful output. Such multimedia interaction should lead to greater vocabulary learning due to more comprehensible input (Jones, 2006). In both situations in Jones’ (2000) study, where students were encouraged to work in pairs, the learning-teaching-learning back and forth of the ZPD came into play and the outcome for the paired students exceeded those of the solo studiers. “The students approached the problem with multiple voices present and developed a sense of shared knowledge that supported their learning and development” (Jones, 2006, p. 49). It appeared that whenever social interactive learning was present

(two or more students interacting), no matter what the learning environment might be, it was likely to be more beneficial than most solo efforts at learning. Jones concluded: “This study also suggests that providing both collaborative and interactive multimedia in a single learning environment can enhance students’ listening comprehension and support their vocabulary learning” (p. 49).

When Haught and McCafferty (2008) used Vygotsky’s ZPD theory to discuss the efficacy of a drama application for second language learning, they indicated that the language teacher’s assistance had a positive effect on students’ second language development through the drama activity. They studied six female EFL students, several of them at university, who collaboratively worked with an experienced drama and language teacher for spoken English development. Students were asked to work together, engaging in drama exercises, working with improvisations, practicing tongue twisters and rehearsing drama scripts. During the process of the EFL students’ practice, the teacher was there to help by “modeling how his interpretation of how the lines of scripts might be said and put into an embodied presentation in accordance with expectations for the production of drama” (p. 157). Haught and McCafferty found that students created a collective ZPD by having the teachers’ assistance, which allowed them to develop their speaking by imitating their teacher. While concentrating on imitation, students also deepened their comprehension of the English drama content, which facilitated their practice of drama in their second language. Aside from the language teacher’s assistance, they found that: “Language learning through dramatic explorations lead to the possibility for language learners to become active participants in their own language learning through engaging in physical, cognitive and affective activity” (p. 159). For instance, at

the individual level, in order to get the answers they were really concerned with, in the process of exploration, students had to speak English to ask for the teacher's help, which later proved to be helpful for students' English fluency.

Characteristics of oral speech. Due to my research focus on students' oral language development, I have reviewed Vygotsky's discussion of oral language. Vygotsky (1987) compares features of oral speech with written speech. He (1987) argues that "written speech is the polar opposite of oral speech" (p. 272). From the connection between written speech, spoken speech and inner speech, Vygotsky explains this argument. He (1987) claims inner speech is an internal rough draft to both oral and written speech. Vygotsky writes:

In oral speech, the tendency for predictability arises frequently and regularly in particular types of situations. In written speech, it never arises. In inner speech, it is always present. Inner speech consists entirely of psychological predicates. As a rule, written speech consists of expanded subjects and predicates. ...The circumstances that sometimes create the potential for purely predicative expressions in oral speech, circumstances that are absent entirely in written speech, are a consistent characteristic of inner speech. They are inseparable from it. ...Thus written and oral speech are polar opposites because the former is maximally expanded and because it is characterized by a complete absence of the circumstances that result in dropping the subject. (p. 273)

In addition, for Vygotsky written speech is a speech "without the interlocutor" (p. 270). Without the presence of interlocutors: "understanding through hints and predicative

expressions is rarely possible in written speech” (p. 270). As a result, individuals have to use more words to express ideas in written speech, making written speech “maximally expanded and syntactically differentiated” (p. 272) compared to oral speech. On the other hand, oral speech has the tendency “for abbreviation and pure predictability” (p. 272) where interlocutors have a clear idea about the topic and where speakers apply intonation for thought expression. Two features are at work in oral speech: the common knowledge shared by interlocutors plus intonation of the expressed thought. In addition, gesture and mime may be present, which can be used to abbreviate oral speech and make it predictable.

Another difference between written speech and oral speech, that Vygotsky (1987) mentions, is that oral speech is dialogical but written speech is monologue. In contrast to written speech, oral speech is a dialogical social interaction. Such dialogical social interaction involves speakers’ immediate expression. He writes “dialogue is speech that consists of rejoinders” (p. 272), interlocutors respond differently based on each other’s input and the dialogue between them is “a chain of reactions” (p. 272). The composition of oral speech is simple. Compared with the “compositional simplicity” (p. 272) of oral speech, the composition of written speech is complex and requires intentions. As Vygotsky states, written speech “introduces speech facts into the field of consciousness. It is much easier to focus on speech facts in monologue than in dialogue. In monologue, the speech relationships become the determinants or sources of the experiences that appear in consciousness” (p. 272).

Two other writers, who base their view on Vygotsky's writing, discuss characteristics of the production of written versus oral speech. Wertsch (2000) states his understanding of Vygotsky's writing regarding the production of oral speech:

Speech production involves a series of genetic transformations from condensed, abbreviated forms of representation involving sense, psychological predicates and so forth to an explicit form of social speech with all its expanded phonetic and auditory aspects, meaning, and so forth.
(p. 25)

He argues that Vygotsky explained speech production as “a micro genetic process of moving from motive and thought to external speech” (p. 24). Mahn (2008) explains that written speech is “another level of abstraction” (p. 123) and argues: “Vygotsky showed that children's systems of meaning, developed in oral language acquisition, provide the foundation for written symbolic representation” (2008, p. 123). Mahn thinks language acquisition is a process of abstraction and in the acquisition of writing there “is another level of abstraction—a child must abstract from the sensual aspect of speech itself” (p. 123). Writing is applying and organizing “representations of words rather than words themselves” (p. 123). He explains that another reason Vygotsky argues that writing involves another level of abstraction is because the interlocutors are absent in written speech.

For this dissertation study, I need to look into students' social interaction characteristics. I included two perspectives: cognitive and sociocultural. The second part of my literature review, I will review literature regarding cognitive perspective of social interaction and meaning negotiation.

Meaning Negotiation

In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), there is a model, “input-interaction-output” (p. 1) for language learning (Block, 2003). “This model explains that interaction between L2 learners and native speakers (as well as interaction between learners) promotes language learning through negotiation of meaning, modified comprehensible input and opportunities for learners to produce language and test new hypotheses” (Martin-Beltrán, 2010, p. 255). In this part, my literature review covers two ideas. Meaning negotiation features raised by Long (1980) and the discussion regarding comprehensible output suggested by Swain (1985, 1995), both major concepts.

Reaching message comprehension. Pica (1994) defines interaction negotiation as “the modification and restructuring of interaction that occurs when learners and their interlocutors anticipate, perceive, or experience difficulties in message comprehensibility” (p. 494). She argues that negotiation is not the only way that a speaker’s interactions can be “modified and restructured” (p. 494), but negotiation emphasizes “achieving comprehensibility of message meaning—both that provided to learners and that provided by learners” (p. 495). Pica (2002) argues that “conversational breakdowns bring interlocutors to shift attention from a sole emphasis on the exchange of message meaning to the perceptual or structural shape that encodes the meaning” (p. 4). Because of the need to repair the communication breakdown, a focus on the form required for comprehensible negotiation of meaning may occur. The lack of comprehensibility cause the listening interlocutor to signal that there is a lack of understanding by an utterance of some sort. Seeing that their message is unclear, or is in some way incomprehensible, the speaker engages in interactive meaning negotiation in

an attempt to bridge the incomprehensibility gap. Central to negotiation of meaning is that “it is the co-operative interaction that enables interlocutors to develop mutual understanding as they work together to overcome communication breakdown” (Oliver, 2008, p. 136).

Meaning negotiation features. Long (1980) defines meaning negotiation features as confirmation checks, comprehension checks and clarification requests, in his study of native speakers-non native speakers (NS-NNS) social interactions. In Long’s definition:

- A confirmation check is any expression by the NS, immediately following an utterance by the interlocutor, which was designed to elicit confirmation that the utterance had been correctly understood or correctly heard by the speakers. ...Confirmation checks are always formed by rising intonation questions, with or without a tag (the man? or the man, right?). They always involve repetition of all or part of interlocutor’s preceding utterance. They are answerable by a simple confirmation (Yes, Mmhm) in the event that the preceding utterance was correctly understood or heard, and required no new information from the interlocutor.
- [A comprehension check is] any expression by a NS designed to establish whether that speaker’s preceding utterance(s) had been understood by the interlocutor. These are typically formed by tag questions, by repetitions of all or part of the same speakers’ preceding utterance(s) uttered with rising question intonation, or by utterances

like “Do you understand?” which explicitly check comprehension by the interlocutor.

- [A clarification request is] any expression by a NS designed to elicit clarification of the interlocutors’ preceding utterances(s). Clarification requests are mostly formed by questions, but may consist of “wh” or yes-no questions (unlike confirmation checks) as well as uninverted intonation and tag questions, for they require that the interlocutor either furnish new information or recode information previously given. Unlike confirmation checks, in other words, there is no presupposition on the speakers’ part that he or she has understood or heard the interlocutor’s previous utterance (p. 81-83).

Varonis and Gass (1985) studied NNS-NNS meaning negotiation features. They suggest a term “indicator” (p. 76) which signals “that an utterance has triggered a non-understanding” (p. 76). Examples of indicators include “echo” responses (p. 76), an “explicit statement of non-understanding” (p. 76), such as saying “pardon?” or “what?” along with “no verbal response and inappropriate response” (p. 76). Examples of the response to indicators include “repetition, expansion, rephrasing, acknowledgement and reduction” (p. 77).

These meaning negotiation features “portray a process in which a listener requests message clarification and confirmation and a speaker follows up these requests, often by repeating, elaborating, or simplifying the original messages” (Pica, 1994). Such features not only happen between NSs, NS-NNS, but even more in NNS-NNS interactions (Pica, 1994; Varonis & Gass, 1985).

Meaning negotiation and second language development. Various writers have discussed how meaning negotiation facilitates second language development. Long (1983) explains how meaning negotiation could promote second language learning, referencing Krashen and Terrell's (1983) Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis which emphasizes the importance of "comprehensible input" on second language development. Long (1983) argues that "it is primarily comprehensible input which feeds the acquisition process, language heard but not understood generally being thought to be little or no use for this purpose" (p. 207). Through negotiation of meaning, second language learners receive comprehensible input, allowing them to realize their communicative purpose. Pica (2002) asserts a similar statement. She writes:

According to Long (1996), learners need access to input that provides positive evidence or data on L2 form as it encodes message meaning. Sources of positive evidence include spoken and written texts that are in their authentic state, as well as those that have been modified for comprehensibility through simplification, redundancy, and elaboration of their linguistic features, interlocutor expectations, or communicative goals. (p. 3)

In a different article, Pica (1994) analyzes how meaning negotiation could facilitate second language learning, by reviewing many studies of L2 negotiations. She explains ways in which "negotiation contributes to conditions, processes, and outcomes of L2 learning by facilitating learners' comprehension and structural segmentation of L2 input, access to lexical form and meaning and production of modified output" (p. 493). Pica argues that exposure to only L2 input is not adequate for second language learners to

internalize L2 forms or structures. Input has to be comprehensible for the benefits of L2 learning (Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Long, 1983). She reviews several empirical studies that showed meaning negotiations to be powerful in reaching comprehensible input. Meanwhile, Pica's analysis supports Swain's (1985) claim that modified output is also necessary for L2 mastery. Pica argues that negotiations also bring opportunities for the learner to "attend to L2 form in their negotiations with the NSs" (p. 509). Pica points out that comprehensible input and output are closely related to learners' attention to L2 form. She argues that negotiation can lead to meaning comprehension, but "it is comprehension of meaning that leads to a focus on, and eventually acquisition of, L2 form" (p. 507). Negotiation would also draw learner's attention to the need for producing comprehensible output. Pica explains that between learners and NS communications, learners are given feedback on their productions. Through feedback, "negotiation brings learners' attention to L2 versions of their interlanguage utterances and heightens their awareness of their own interlanguage system" (p. 514). Therefore, Pica reiterates that negotiations provide positive benefits to learner's comprehensible input, their production of output and their access to L2 form.

Some studies (Chaudron, 1983; Gass & Varonis, 1994; Kawaguchi & Ma, 2012; Long 1983; Mackey & Philip, 1998) have indicated the positive effects of native speaker's interactional modifications on non-native speakers' language learning. Chaudron (1983) summarizes three effects of NS' input modifications on learner's second language acquisition stating that such modifications would "enhance perception and comprehension", "promote correct and meaningful target language use"(p. 438) and help learners acquire structure by presenting sentence structure frequently (p. 438). He

argues that repeated noun reinstatement was the most effective way for learners' immediate recall and recognition of post-passage information presented in a recorded lecture. He concludes that redundancy is, at least, beneficial for L2 learners' preliminary intake and "learner's perception and comprehension of forms" (p. 438). Finally, he points out the complexity of native speakers' input on L2 learners' learning, because no single form of modification would be appropriate for a group of L2 learners with different language proficiencies.

Gass and Varonis (1994) argue that social interaction between native and non-native speakers "provides a forum for the learner to readily detect a discrepancy between their learner language and the target language and that the awareness of the mismatch serves the function of triggering a modification of existing second language" (p. 294). After they studied 16 NS-NNS dyads tasked with where to place objects, they found that the NNS made fewer errors when they were allowed to interact with NS during the task process; NNS understood better if a modified script was provided as opposed to unmodified script. In the end, they conclude that "modification significantly and positively affects comprehension" (p. 294).

From a perspective of recast, Mackey and Philip (1998) researched NS' recast on the development of NNS second language learning (Kawaguchi & Ma, 2012; Long, 2007; Mackey and Goo, 2007; Oliver, 2008). Based on their understandings of Farrar's (1992) and Long's (1996) explanation of recast, Mackey and Philip interpreted recasts as utterances in which "the central meaning is retained while morphological, syntactic, or lexical elements may be changed" (p. 341). They compared the effective difference between negotiated interaction with intensive recast and negotiated interaction without

recasts on NNS second language learning in an EFL class. Thirty-five beginners and lower intermediate English learners were divided by the researchers into different groups according to the level of their English proficiency. The research results suggested that learners with a higher language level, receiving intensive recast, showed a significant increase in their utterance structure compared to higher language level learners who did not receive intensive recast. The explanation was that recasts can provide the language learners more target language models and thus form the learners' potential language database faster. NNS were forced to ask NS questions to get recasts of their utterances. Such recasts provided language learners opportunities to repeat after or modify their speech. The repetition and modification can help learners become more familiar with the questions or sentence structures that they have raised (Mackey & Philip, 1998). Besides second language sentence structure, Kawaguchi and Ma (2012) found that NNS-NS social interaction also helped provide greater learning effect in pronunciation and vocabulary learning to NNS.

Regarding non-native speaker to non-native speaker social interaction, there are also studies, which indicate that NNS-NNS negotiation benefits learners' second language learning. Varonis and Gass (1985) summarize two important functions of NNS-NNS interaction. First, NNS-NNS interaction provides "a non-threatening forum" (p. 87) for NNSs to practice second language skills, because both speakers are learning a second language with a deficient competency so they do not feel threatened by the other speaker's competence. Second, when NNS and NNS talk to each other, the modifications made to make their speech comprehensible can work as comprehensible language input for other second language learners.

In another study, Kawaguchi and Ma (2012) compared meaning negotiations between two native speakers, two lower-level Chinese learners and two high-level Chinese learners. The six subjects formed 14 different dyads for the study. They found that if a lower level NNS interacted with a high level NNS, there would be more opportunities for them to provide correction feedback and meaning negotiations than in NNS-NS interactions. Especially interesting were interactions between high-level NNS and lower-level NNS, which greatly helped the lower-level NNS' grammar learning because "NNS (High) are more experienced in L2 learning and possibly more sensitive to grammatical issues than natives: NNS (High) are able to notice and correct their partners' grammatical errors through negotiated interaction" (p. 68).

In addition the studies regarding the meaning negotiations between NNS-NNS and NS-NNS, in the field of SLA, many researchers have studied which activity types can promote meaning negotiations between speakers (Doughty & Pica, 1986; Jenks, 2009; Pica & Doughty, 1985; Pica, 1994, 2005). Varonis and Gass (1985) conclude that "the greater the degree of difference which exists in the background of the conversational participants, the greater the amount of negotiations in the conversation between two non-native speakers" (p. 84). They argue that for NNS who do not share the same linguistic, social and cultural knowledge, the conflicts of such knowledge and or deficiencies in either or both second language competencies may cause discontinuity of conversation. Therefore, any breakdowns in conversations must be resolved through NNS' meaning negotiation before their conversation can continue.

To other writers, information exchange tasks generated more learners' meaning negotiations (Doughty & Pica, 1986; Pica and Doughty; 1985; Pica, 1987), because this

kind of task “places all participants in equal positions, each with the same amount of information, which must be disseminated to other participants” (Doughty & Pica, 1986, p. 320). On the other hand, problem-solving and decision-making tasks have no information gap and so it is not absolutely necessary for participants to reach a final solution through social interaction. Participants might be encouraged to produce speech but not be required to do so. As a result, the more competent speakers will practice much more than middle-level students who will lack the opportunity to ask for clarification and confirmation. Much of the input from advanced participants or teachers might be totally incomprehensible to many students.

Among the information exchange activities, information gap tasks play a key role in second language learning (Foster & Ohta, 2005; Jenks, 2009; Pica, 2002). Pica (1987) defined information gap activities as “one participant holds all information necessary for completing a task and the other participants must work to elicit it” (p. 18). Foster and Ohta (2005) write that “information gap tasks transacted by dyads were likely to give most opportunities for negotiation of meaning” (p. 405). Foster and Ohta (2005) explain the rationale of why information gap activity works for students’ second language development. They write as follows:

There are many versions of information gap tasks, but each has the same basic rationale: hide certain information from one or more participants so that, in order to get it, they need to understand and be understood with clarity. This makes it likely that meaning will be negotiated, incomprehensible input will be made comprehensible and, if it contains forms and structures, which are just a little beyond the learner’s current

level of competence (i.e. the crucial +1), then second language acquisition (SLA) is facilitated. SLA is also facilitated by the learner's having to modify utterances for which an interlocutor has requested clarification, promoting attention to language forms and precision in phonology, lexis and morphosyntax. (p. 405-406)

Nakahama, Tyler and van Lier (2001) raised a different opinion about information activity. They compared meaning negotiations between NS-NNS in two types of activities: conversational activity and a two-way information gap tasks. The conversational activity involved NS and NNS talking about topics which were common to both of them. The two-way information gap activity involved NS and NNS spotting difference in their pictures without showing to each other. In an investigation of meaning negotiation quality and quantity, their research indicated that although conversational activity offered fewer chances of meaning negotiations between NS-NNS than information gap activity, "conversational activity provided NNS interlocutors with a larger range of opportunities for language use than the information gap activity" (p. 401). Conversational activity meaning negotiations focused on overall conversation comprehension while information gap activity meaning negotiations primarily focused on discrete items, such as lexical terms. Also, through meaning negotiations, conversational activity provided NNS more opportunities to produce complex sentences and apply discourse strategies. NNS interviews suggested that they felt it was more challenging for them to start and maintain conversational activity because they had to understand NS questions and statements instead of having to only understand the content of certain

pictures. Nakahama, Tyler and van Lier concluded that conversation activities “offer substantial opportunities at multiple levels of interaction” (p. 377).

Producing comprehensible output. In a different article, Swain (1995) discusses in detail the three functions of non-native speaker’s output. In her opinion, learners can fake their comprehension of language input, but they cannot fake their output. She writes that “to produce, learners need to do something; they need to create linguistic form and meaning and in so doing, discover what they can and cannot do” (p. 127). The basic function of learners’ output is that learners’ linguistic production can enhance their second language fluency. Regarding the concept of strengthening “accuracy” (p. 128), she discusses three functions of linguistic output that might promote second language learners’ language usage accuracy. The first function is that output promotes “noticing” (p. 129). Swain explains that through their output, second language learners can notice the differences between what they intend to say and what they did say. This noticing of actual output may help learners realize hidden linguistic problems and push them to explore their second language usages further. Such activity triggers “cognitive process” (p. 130), causing learners to try new second language expressions and so strengthen their existing knowledge. Swain says that learners’ “noticing function” (p. 128) plays a “consciousness-raising role” (p. 128). The second function that Swain puts forward is something she calls “hypothesis testing” (p. 130). Learners use their output production as “one way of testing a hypothesis about the comprehensibility or linguistic well-formedness” (p. 126). Swain argues that sometimes hypothesis testing receives feedback which will help learners “modify or reprocess” (p. 126) their language production; even if

the feedback cannot provide immediate effect, experimentation with their new language is still valuable for their learning.

Pica, Halliday, Lewis and Morgenthaler (1986) also mention the importance and significance of second language hypothesis testing. They argue that when interlocutors have not completely understood each other's messages, they frequently request clarification or confirmation of messages, and as a result provide opportunities for learners to modify their output. "In so doing, they test hypotheses about the second language, experiment with new structures and forms and expand and exploit their interlanguage resources in a creative way" (p. 64). Pica, Halliday, Lewis and Morgenthaler (1989) also studied NNS-NS social interaction, looking at how different meaning negotiation moves facilitated comprehensible output production. They write that "NNS tended to modify their output most often when NS signaled an explicit need for clarification rather than provided a model utterance for confirmation" (p. 83).

The third function that Swain (1995) mentions is the "reflective function" (p. 141). This means that second language learners consciously reflect on their second language usages forms, so that their "output serves a metalinguistic function, enabling them to control and internalize their linguistic knowledge" (p. 126). Swain references findings from 2 studies conducted by Donato (1994) and Donna LaPierre (1994) and argues that after students reflect on their language forms in a meaning-based task, they would produce their negotiations of forms sometime later, which is a sign of language learning. She concludes "that talk about form in the context of a meaning based task is output that promotes second language learning" (p. 140). Swain claims that there is no guarantee that any of the three functions will, necessarily, operate whenever second language learners

apply their target language. More research needs to be done to determine under which conditions the functions of output will work to promote learners' second language learning.

In a different article, Swain (2000) further develops the concept of output. Referencing Vygotsky's sociocultural theory regarding "language as a mediating tool" (Swain, 2000, p. 104), she argues that producing comprehensible output is not just a cognitive activity but also a social activity. Swain relabels output as "speaking, writing, utterance, verbalization and collaborative dialogue" (p. 103). Then from a sociocultural perspective, Swain concludes that "language learning occurs in collaborative learning" (p. 113) and writes:

In sum, collaborative dialogue is problem-solving and, hence, knowledge building dialogues. When a collaborative effort is being made by participants in an activity, their speaking (or writing) mediates this effort. As each participant speaks, their "saying" becomes "what they said", providing an object of their reflection. Their saying is cognitive activity, and "what is said" is an outcome of that activity. Through saying and reflecting on what was said, new knowledge is constructed. (p. 113)

In addition, Swain also suggests that language output facilitated learners' "strategic process and linguistic knowledge" (p. 113).

Students' communicative competence is my research's ultimate concern.

Reviewing the work related to communicative competence development provides a standard to assess students' oral communicative competence in an EFL environment. In

the next section, the basis for my literature review is communicative competence framework suggested by Canale and Swain (1980).

Communicative Competence

I start by introducing the historical development of communicative competence. Then, I take a close look at a discussion regarding communicative competence framework as presented by Canale and Swain (1980). Finally, I review studies related to the three components of communicative competence.

Historical development. Campbell, Wales and Hymes were among the first to point out that the distinction between competence and performance “provides no place for consideration of the appropriateness of sociocultural significance of an utterance in the situational and verbal context in which it used” (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 4). Their discussions about communicative competence began with their critique of Chomsky’s innate hypothesis and distinction of competence and performance.

Campbell and Wales (1970) criticize Chomsky’s (1968) hypothesis of the innate idea that regards children as having universal formal principles that determine language structure and ignore the learning factor involved in language learning. Campbell and Wales argue that according to the innate hypothesis, learning language is simply explained by “innate predispositions” (p. 248). This hypothesis fails to take environmental factors into consideration in the development of communicative competence. They write that “much of what we say and write is constrained, in important ways, by the particular circumstance in which we are speaking or writing” (p. 248). Meanwhile, they also argue that Chomsky’s definition of competence, the knowledge of grammar and other aspects of language, omits the most important linguistic ability, “the

ability to produce or understand utterances which are not so much grammatical but, more important, appropriate to the context in which they are made” (p. 247). They assert that “contextual factors” (p. 248) played an important role in language learning.

Hymes (1972) expresses deep doubt for Chomsky’s theory of linguistic competence and performance and his characterization of competence and performance. Hymes argues that, according to Chomsky, linguistic competence is inherent in the ideal speaker-listener’s grammatical knowledge along with other aspects of language in a homogeneous speech community and that such knowledge can enable the user to produce and understand infinite sentences. Hymes (1972) writes that Chomsky further claimed linguistic performance is concerned only with the process of “encoding and decoding” (p. 55). According to Hymes, such a distinction treats the development of competence as basically “independent of sociocultural features” (p. 55) and views performance as basically related to the “psychological byproducts of the analysis of grammar, not, say, social interaction” (p. 55), thus disregarding language use as a social action and seeing it as only being related to members’ perception, memory, and attention. Hymes further points out that, in a homogenous speech society, it is not uncommon for members to have different language competences. He states that these differential competences are not related to members’ cognitive ability but rather to their situational and community diversity, “in particular, differential competence has itself a developmental history in one’s life” (p. 67). He states that acceptable and correct grammatical form is determined by social and contextual factors.

After Hymes points out that Chomsky’s competence and performance distinction overlooked social and contextual factors in language development, he writes that “a

normal child acquires knowledge of sentence, not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner” (p. 60). In general, the acquisition of competence is determined by “social experience, needs and motives” (p. 60). Children’s competence can be drastically changed by new social factors. Hymes concludes:

Within the developmental matrix in which knowledge of the sentence of a language is acquired, children also acquire knowledge of a set of ways in which sentences are used. From a finite experience of speech acts and their interdependence with sociocultural features, they develop a general theory of speaking appropriate in their community, which they employ, like other forms of tacit cultural knowledge (competence) in conducting and interpreting social life. (p. 61)

Hymes’ conclusion suggests that understanding communicative competence requires sociocultural consideration.

Widdowson (1983) criticizes the limitation of using grammatical rules only in second language classrooms and advocated for the importance of teaching language social rules as well. He argues that linguistic competence learning was “the internalization of a system of rules which defines correct linguistic component” (p. 97) and says that linguistic competence “rarely determines what people can do in any absolute sense” (p. 97). He writes:

The aim of language teaching has generally been understood as the gradual consolidation of competence in the learner’s mind. Correctness is

crucial to this operation since competence in language means conformity to rule. Any expression that does not conform is by definition ill formed and a sign of incompetence. But to force the learners into compliance in this way is to suppress the very creative capacity by which competence is naturally achieved. It is not surprising, therefore, that attempts at error elimination by exhortation and drills are so seldom effective. (p. 104)

While critical of teaching and learning linguistic language rules, Widdowson suggests that learners “behave in the natural manner of the language user” (p. 103) and apply whatever knowledge they have, including the utterance errors, in getting the meaning across, depending on various communication requirements. Widdowson further points out that learners’ language competence cannot be directly taught; it requires learners to recognize the language rules and to constrain and organize their language use, in an effective way, to meet communicative goals.

Meyer (1990) studied a Spanish as a second language learner who worked as a translator for a native English speaker and a native Spanish speaker. He was asked to translate the native English speaker’s questions into Spanish for the native Spanish speaker and then translate the native Spanish speaker’s answers into English so that the native English speaker could understand. For the first part of the translation, this second language learner worked as an impersonal facilitator instead of actively participating in the conversation. His role was to translate only the information provided to him, and he finished most tasks without many problems. In the later part of the translation process, this Spanish as a second language learner stepped out of the impersonal translator’s role and initiated questions for the native Spanish speakers, becoming actively involved in the

social interaction of the two speakers. At the end of the translation, this second language learner showed great achievement in his phonological, semantic and conceptual levels. After analyzing the research data, Meyer (1990) concludes that “communicative competence is a social production, an interactional achievement, not a personal quality or characteristic” (p. 209). She also points out that “different facts of communicative competence, or incompetence, are visible at different times and in different interactions” (p. 210).

Communicative competence framework. In 1980, in an analysis and review of much research and literature regarding communicative competence, Canale and Swain outline a framework of communicative competence, which they hope would support a communicative approach for second language teaching and learning. They include three main components in their communicative competence theory: “grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence” (p. 28). Savignon (2007) claims Canale and Swain have provided a classic classroom framework for training a learner’s communicative competence. She writes: “The Canale and Swain framework provided what would prove a pedagogical breakthrough in extending the description of language use and learning in terms of more than just sentence level structure that had remained the focus of audiolingualism” (p. 209). For my study, I have applied this framework as a standard for assessing my students’ oral communicative competence development.

Canale and Swain’s definitions state that grammatical competence includes “the knowledge of lexical items and of rules of morphology, syntax sentences-grammar semantics and phonology” (p. 29). Sociolinguistic competence includes two sets of rules: “sociocultural rules of use and rules of discourse” (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 30).

Sociocultural rules of language focus on a particular sociocultural context and the extent to which language users' propositions and communication are appropriate, and also, on "which appropriate attitude and register or style are conveyed by a particular grammatical form" (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 30). Rules of discourse are related to a language user's application of appropriate grammatical forms (such as propositional links) to make the discourse coherent or to make their actual communication's contextual meaning coherent. In a later article, Canale (1983) raises "discourse competence" to elaborate on the "rules of discourse" and writes: "Unity of a text is achieved through cohesion in form and coherence in meaning. Cohesion deals with how utterances are linked structurally and facilitates interpretation of a text" (p. 9). Canale lists "pronouns, synonyms, ellipsis, conjunctions and parallel structures" as cohesion devices. Canale argues that "coherence refers to the relationships among different meanings in a text, where these meanings may be literal meanings, communicative functions and attitude" (p. 9). Finally, Canale and Swain define strategic competence as referring to verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that language users apply when communication breaks down due to a lack of competence or to performance variables.

With this communicative competence framework, Canale and Swain (1980) suggest a communicative approach for second language teaching. Since communicative competence has three components—grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic—the goal of second language teaching must be to help learners develop the integration of all three competences. Emphasis on grammatical competence only cannot facilitate language learners in developing their comprehensive communicative competence. An effective communicative approach should aim to satisfy learners' needs. It is particularly important

that activities for a communicative approach should situate learners in “genuine communicative situations” (p. 27) for the target language. An assortment of communication experiences under various situations should strengthen learners’ communicative confidence. Second language learners should have opportunities to communicate with highly competent target language speakers. While, at the early stages of second language learning, a communicative approach should present learners with “more arbitrary and less universal aspects of communication in second language” (p. 28) which will involve learners in practicing in the situational context of “less arbitrary and more universal aspects” (p. 28), such as how to make a request or how to greet others. Additionally, second language teaching with a communicative approach should “provide the learners with the information, practice and much of the experience needed to meet their communicative needs in the second language” (p. 28). Canale and Swain emphasize the importance of learning about the second language culture. Learner’s second language cultural knowledge is necessary for them to draw “inferences about the social meanings of value of utterances” (1980, p. 28). Canale and Swain (1980) summarize their rationale for proposing a communicative approach:

The communicative approach that we envisage is thus an integrative one in which emphasis on preparing second language learners to exploit—initially through aspects of sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence acquired through experience in communicative use of the first or dominant language—those grammatical features of the second language that are selected on the basis of, among other criteria, their grammatical and cognitive complexity, transparency with respect to

communicative functions, probability of use by native speakers, generalizability to different communicative functions and contexts and relevance to the learners' needs in the second language. (p. 29)

After reviewing the framework of communicative competence, I reviewed studies individually regarding three components of the framework.

Grammatical competence. Savignon (2002) points out that in studies of communicative competence development, grammar or “form accuracy” (p. 6) is not frequently discussed. She argues that this infrequent discussion of grammar leads to learners' impression that grammar is not important. Savignon writes that “communication cannot take place in the absence of structures, or grammar, a set of shared assumptions about how language works, along with a willingness of participants to cooperate in the negotiation of meaning” (p. 7).

Celce-Murcia (1991) argues that rather than looking at grammar as a standalone system that is learned after the fact, “for its own sake” (p. 459), we should instead build it into our pedagogy, letting it interact with and combination of discourse, meaning making or any other component of communicative competence being addressed in our instruction . She argues that if the learners are beginners or young children, focus on form would not be likely to be beneficial. “However, if the learners are at the intermediate or advanced level, it may well be necessary for the teacher to provide some form-related feedback and correction in order for learners to progress” (p. 463).

Sociolinguistic competence. Many studies focus on the sociocultural rules of use, suggesting linking language and culture and their relevance for teaching and learning (Clancy, 1990; Gilmore, 2011; Kramsch, 1998; Meyer, 1990; Savignon, 1983, 1985;

Swain & Lapkin, 1990; Yorio, 1980). Clancy's 1990 study examined cultural influence on native language learning by studying how Japanese children acquired an "intuitive and indirect" (p. 27) communication style, arguing that the social interaction between Japanese mothers and their children carried a strong influence of Japanese culture which emphasizes "empathy and conformity" (p. 33). Indirect speech, therefore, is a characteristic of Japanese language. Finally, Clancy suggests that first language learning needs to consider the cultural influence reflected through social interaction.

Other writers (Alptekin, 2002; Lyster, 1994; Muniandy, Nair, & Ahmad, 2010; van Compernelle & Williams, 2009, 2012; Yu, 2005) suggest developing learners' awareness that their own sociocultural system is different from other cultures as a way to develop learners' sociolinguistic competence. Yu (2005) compared Chinese and American compliment behavior in terms of strategies, topics, frequency, function and utterance structure features. Yu found that Chinese compliment behavior was significantly different from American compliment behavior and concluded that "cultural norms played a crucial role in compliment behavior" (p. 115). Through this comparison study, Yu suggested that foreign language learners need to understand target language sociocultural rules and develop cross-cultural understanding in order to acquire sociolinguistic competence.

Compernelle and Williams (2009, 2012) suggest that teachers should use movies, the internet and other communicative activities to draw learners' attention to the sociolinguistic, stylistic and linguistic variations of a second language and to assist them in understanding what those variations mean in different social contexts. They argue that this cultural differences awareness is important for second language learning.

Peacock's (1997) study in EFL teaching demonstrated the importance of second language authentic material on second language development. He suggests using authentic material such as English newspapers, poems, songs and so on. Artificial material was defined by Peacock as "materials produced specifically for language learners, e.g. exercises found in the course books and supplementary material" (p. 144). He studied two classes at a South Korean university EFL institute. Both classes used authentic and artificial material alternatively. The research findings showed that when authentic material was applied, students' on-task behavior, concentration, and involvement in the target activity was greater than when using artificial materials; also the researcher observed that student motivation increased significantly. His study indicated the efficacy of involving second language culture in learners' second language learning.

Savignon and Sysoyev (2002) propose a method to help second language learners develop sociocultural competence. They point out that many foreign language learners do not have the opportunity to socially interact with second language native speakers or communicate with second language cultural representatives. Because of this, such learners have fewer opportunities for "beyond-the-classroom" interactions, and must depend on in-school second language social interaction programs. In order to promote sociocultural competence for these kinds of learners, Savignon and Sysoyev suggest that an explicit training of sociocultural strategies would benefit their second language sociocultural competence development. Savignon and Sysoyev explain that the explicit training includes three stages: explanation, exploration and expression. They categorized two types of sociocultural strategies: "(a) strategies for establishing and maintaining

intercultural contact, and (b) strategies for creating sociocultural portraits of a L2 context” (p. 521). Savignon and Sysoyev define the strategies for establishing and maintaining intercultural contact as:

1. Initiating and maintaining intercultural contact for the purpose of learning about the values, norms, spiritual heritage, and so forth of a L2 culture; acting as a representative of your own culture.
2. Anticipating sociocultural lacunae that can result in misunderstanding, creation of false stereotypes and intercultural conflict.
3. Taking initiative and responsibility for avoiding intercultural misunderstanding, explaining features of one’s own culture; asking interlocutor to explain features of their culture.
4. Using diplomacy for the purpose of maintaining a dialogue of cultures in the spirit of peace and mutual understanding; redirecting a discussion to a more neutral topic; dissimulation of personal views to avoid potential conflict. (p. 513)

They define strategies for creating sociocultural portraits of a L2 context and the participants in intercultural communication as the following:

5. Making analogies, oppositions, generalizations, and comparisons between facts and realities of L1 and L2 cultures.
6. Identification and interpretation of unfamiliar features of a L2 culture; identification of new communicative situations.

7. Classification, compilation, generalization of sociocultural information when working with mass media, including the Internet, and information-reference literature.
8. Review of authentic cultural material. (p. 513)

Based on their proposal above, in a Russian high school, Savignon and Sysoyev (2002) conducted a study using explicit training to teach students sociocultural strategies. They found that students showed positive attitudes towards sociocultural strategies training and that most participants indicated they would like to act as representatives of their own culture and so needed second language sociocultural strategies training so that they could create warm relationships with people from other cultures. They also found that the first type of sociocultural strategy training “encouraged learner interaction in the L2 and prepared them for spontaneous use of their L2 in subsequent communication beyond the classroom” (p. 520). The second type of sociocultural strategy training “provided experience essential to the development of techniques for initiating and maintaining intercultural exchange in a spirit of peace and a dialogue of cultures” (p. 520). Finally, they concluded that the inclusion of sociocultural strategies to L2 programs prepared learners for “intercultural communication in a spirit of peace and a dialogue of cultures” (p. 521).

Strategic competence. Dörnyei and Thurrell (1991) claim strategic competence is fairly independent of other components for communicative competence. They write that “strategic competence is activated when learners wish to convey messages which their linguistic resources do not allow them to express successfully” (p. 18).

In 1983, Færch and Kasper established “a first list of communicative strategies based on the observed strategic attitudes of adults in formal settings” (Le Pichon, de Swart, Vorstman & van den Bergh, 2010, p. 451). In 1984, in a different article, aiming to solve problems in language production, Færch and Kasper (1984) presented productive communicative strategies. They argue that communicative strategies include reduction strategies in which formal and functional reductions are two subcategories of reduction strategies. Learners apply formal reduction for the purpose of using language correctly; as a result, they avoid language rules and vocabulary which they are not able to smoothly express. Functional reduction is further divided into “actional functional reduction”, “propositional functional reduction” and “modal functional reduction” (p. 48-49). Learners apply actional functional reduction to “avoid performing a certain speech act” (p. 49); propositional functional reduction refers to learners that avoided some topics and abandon messages; modal functional reduction refers to “the learners’ decision not to mark a speech act for relational (politeness) and expressive functions” (p.49).

Færch and Kasper assert communicative strategies also include achievement strategies, which typically aim to “preserve the language user’s original communicative goal” (p. 49). Achievement strategies refer to learners who apply “non-cooperative strategies” (p. 50), using alternative ways to express original goals or “cooperative strategies” (p. 50), developing a solution with the interlocutor’s assistance to reach the

original communicative goal. Learners apply non-cooperative strategies to “compensate for linguistic means which are not available or accessible” (p. 50), such as code switching, literal translation, substitutions, generalization, description, exemplification, restructuring, mime, gesture and sound imitation. Finally, cooperative strategies “involve a joint problem-solving effort by both interlocutors” (p. 51); it is initiated by an interlocutor’s direct or indirect appeal.

Based on Færch and Kasper’s work, Le Pichon, de Swart, Vorstman and van den Bergh (2010) suggest nine strategies that can be used for children to learn an additional language: “anticipation, directed attention, clarification, cooperation, management of emotions, code switching, mime, imitation and asking for assistance” (p. 451). Using these nine communicative strategies as a criterion, Le Pichon, de Swart, Vorstman and van den Bergh compared the strategic competence of children who had additional formal language learning experience (LLE) with children who had acquired two languages in a non-formal context (nLLE). They put both groups of children within an “exolingual situation” (p. 452), a situation in which the interlocutors did not share the same language with them, and then studied the thinking aloud protocols of 101 children. Their study showed that “LLE children are using significantly more strategies in an exolingual situation in comparison to nLLE children; LLE children access a broader range of strategies” (p. 458). The study concluded that a language learning experience was an enhancement factor for children to develop strategic competence.

Barkaoui, Brooks, Swain and Lapkin (2005) define strategic behavior as “conscious goal-oriented thoughts and actions that the learners report using to acquire or manipulate information (e.g. predicting, translating, planning, monitoring) and to manage

or carry out cognitive processes” (p. 4). According to these authors, an important component of communicative competence, when assessing overall L2 ability, is strategic competence. This component plays a major role in dealing with communication breakdowns and is therefore a valuable asset for L2 learners. A learner’s ability to regulate a communication breakdown and to find a strategic means or path that will reestablish meaningful communication, thus allowing the conversation to continue, is a very good indicator of overall communicative competence. Barkaoui, Brooks, Swain and Lapkin compared strategic behavior in independent tasks and integrated tasks and discovered that overall use of strategies was found to be proportional to the complexity of the tasks, with difficult and integrated tasks demanding the greatest use of strategies for task completion. They found integrated use of multiple language skills caused more complexity in task performance and called for increased use of strategies for performance completion. The greater the number of integrated skills, the greater was the need for strategy; also the greater showing of strategic competence of the speaker, or not, depending on speaker ability (p. 15-16).

Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1995) identify five parts of strategic competence: (a) avoidance or reduction strategies, such as “replacing messages, avoiding topics” (p. 27) and dropping messages; (b) achievement or compensatory strategies, including “circumlocution, approximation (using a general word to replace a specific word, such as a ship for fishing boat), all purpose words (things, people), non-linguistic means (gestures, pictures), reconstructing, word-coinage, literal translation, foreignizing, code switching and retrieval (bro, bron, bronze)” (p. 28); (c) stalling strategies, such as “fillers, hesitation devices” (p. 27) (Well, Where was I?) and repetition; (d) self-

monitoring strategies such as correcting or changing one's own speech; (e) interactional strategies, highlighting the cooperative strategies between speakers. Interactional strategies include "appeals for help" (p. 28), meaning negotiation, as well as "response and comprehension checks" (p. 28).

Summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed the theoretical foundation of my dissertation: Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. In order to investigate students' social interaction characteristics, I reviewed literature regarding students' cognitive perspective of social interaction: meaning negotiations. Finally I reviewed a communicative competence framework for the purpose of assessing my students' oral communicative competence development in an EFL environment. In the next chapter, I will introduce the methodology of my study: how I collected and analyzed data for both phases of the study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

I applied practitioner action research as my dissertation study research methodology. As mentioned in my dissertation title, my study is a collaborative study with my students. They were not just my subjects but worked as co-researchers with me, since the practitioner action researcher's goal is to improve teaching and learning, not to prove something (Roberts, personal communication, February 1, 2012). In the field of education, Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (2007) define practitioner's action research as "insider" research done by practitioners using their own sites (classroom, institution, school district, community) as the focus of their study. They write:

Action research is an ongoing series of cycles involving moments of planned actions, acting, observing effects and reflecting on one's observations. These cycles form a spiral that result in refinements of research questions, resolutions of problems, and the transformations in the perspectives of researchers and participants. (p. 2-3)

Meanwhile, sociocultural theory advocates collaborative research, which emphasizes "co-participation, cooperative learning and discovery; teachers bring existing knowledge to students by co-constructing with them" (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 199). Also, Vygotsky (1978) uses genetic analysis to suggest that research needs "to concentrate not on the product of development but on the very process by which higher forms are established" (p. 64). My practitioner action research reflects collaboration between teacher and learners; it also focuses on the process of how students develop their oral English communicative competence, applying a collaborative, communication-oriented pedagogy to teaching over the course of two semesters. A collaborative

pedagogy was related to class organizations. Through group or pair work, I aimed at providing students collaboration opportunities in their learning processes.

Communication-oriented pedagogy was used for learning class content: students practiced various communicative activities in their second language. My research included two phases, and I conducted phase one of the study in 2010. A year after phase one of my study, I went back to the same class and conducted phase two of the study with my students.

Phase One of the Study

I have always been interested in researching ways to improve my Chinese students' oral English development within an EFL environment. In 2010, I conducted phase one of my study, related to oral English teaching and learning, at a university where my parents once worked, Wuhan University of Science and Technology (WUST). Phase one of the study covered the entire Fall semester of 2010. The action of phase one was to apply communicative activities in groups and pairs to promote students' social interactions for oral English learning.

Participants. Wuhan University of Science and Technology (WUST), China, is a state university of about thirty thousand students, where most students major in science ("Xuexiao gaikuang", n.d., para, 2). Students come from various provinces of China (Fang, personal communication, September 1, 2010). For phase one, there were 39 college freshmen in my class: 26 from rural areas and 13 from urban areas, three females and 36 males, all of them majoring in Mechanical Engineering. I randomly divided 39 students into seven groups: four groups with six students and three groups with five students. My students were all freshmen, new to each other and coming from ten different

provinces in China; this meant that random division was not too difficult. While I was teaching students English reading, writing, speaking and listening for 200 minutes per week (100 minutes for writing and reading; 100 minutes for speaking and listening), I conducted phase one of my dissertation study along with my teaching duties over a 14-week span. We started our class on October 8, 2010, because freshmen students had military training in September.

Data collection. At the beginning of phase one of the study, I went through the consent form with my students. The consent form was a new concept for these Chinese students. Although discipline, harmony, and obedience are a part of the student mindset in Chinese classroom culture (Rao, 2006), I still spent a lot of time explaining it so that they would understand what I was asking of them. I emphasized the “voluntary participation rules” for them, using Chinese to make certain that they knew that their final score would not be related to their participation in the research. I also told them in advance that the research would take extra time after class and that the purpose was to help improve our teaching and learning together.

In order to collect students’ demographic information and to investigate their oral English learning history at the secondary level, plus their motivations and interests, I asked all 39 students to fill out a questionnaire in Chinese (Appendix A). I wrote this questionnaire in Mandarin Chinese for the purpose of accurately collecting their information. Since in phase one of the study, the action was applying communicative activities in groups and pairs, I used different measures to collect both students’ and my perspectives regarding group or pair work and communicative activities. I list my data collection in Table 1 with a detailed explanation.

Table 1

Data Collection For Phase One Of The Study

Time	Teacher's perspective	Students' perspectives
Every week	Audio recordings, field notes,	Journals
Every other week		Self-reports (Appendix B)
The end of each month	Summary self-reflection	Students' feedback about teacher's self-reflection
Presentation of after- class activities	Audio recordings field notes	Group reports (Appendix C) peer evaluations (Appendix D)

EFL teacher's perspective. I collected data from my perspective through the following means. Every week, during class time, mainly in the speaking and listening class, I audio recorded one of seven groups (sometimes pairs) and wrote quick notes about students' social interaction process: how they started, discussed and finally presented their communicative activities. I audio recorded all seven groups during the semester. Then, at the end of every month, after sorting through my field notes and audio recordings, I summarized students' social interaction characteristics from starting stage, process stage and ending stage. I also wrote self-reflections regarding my understanding of students' oral English learning achievements and difficulties.

Students' perspectives. I collected data from the students' perspectives in phase one of the study through the following means. I exchanged journals with every student

weekly to understand my students better, gaining their opinions and responses to questions such as: Do you like working with your classmates? How much did you speak in your group today? I also commented on their presentations in class; at the beginning of our class, students were encouraged to write their journals(usually on every Friday) in English, but students with beginning levels of English ended up writing to me mainly in Chinese. I asked students to fill out self-reports (Appendix B) to reflect on class learning every other week during the semester. I required group reports (Appendix C) every time students had to prepare for after-class activities to investigate how they organized and designed their oral English learning. I asked students to fill out peer evaluations (Appendix D) of classmates' presentations (four times) of dramas and PowerPoint presentations to examine if observing peers' social interactions could facilitate students' oral English learning. At the end of every month, I projected my teaching reflections about students' learning achievements and difficulties on the whiteboard to share with my students, and then I asked them to write feedback in their journals after they had read my reflections—a form of member checking my observations and interpretations.

Data analysis. In phase one of the study, my purpose was to promote students' social interactions for their oral English learning in an EFL environment. Therefore, my data analysis focused on the effect of group or pair work and communicative activities on students' social interactions for oral English learning.

Group or pair work. When analyzing data regarding the efficacy of group or pair work, I sorted through my field notes of class observations and wrote my monthly summarization under three categories: how they sat inside the group; how peers helped

each other and how the group atmosphere was. I also coded students' self-reports (Appendix B) and journals of their reflections by categorizing any mention of peers' help, comfort in speaking within the group or discomfort with working in groups.

Communicative activities. In phase one of the study, students practiced both in-class and after-class activities. For in-class activities, at the end of every month, I wrote a summary, for which I depended on audio recordings and my field notes to describe students' complete social interaction processes. I listed three categories in the summary: starting stage, process stage and ending stage. In the starting stage, I wrote down information such as who started the conversation and whether students wrote first or verbally discussed in order to prepare for their oral activities. In the process stage, I summarized information, such as how many students participated in the conversation, and whether or not students asked for peer's help. What did they use to aid their speaking? Was there any disagreement inside the group? What are the characteristics of students' utterance? In the ending stage, I summarized information, such as who presented and why they chose him or her to present, and whether or not the presentation reflected the students' group discussion?

I coded students' self-reports (Appendix B) and journal reflections under the categories of learning difficulties, achievements and expectations for oral English learning. For after-class activities, I depended on students' group reports (Appendix C) to summarize the process of how they prepared for after-class activities. For students' peer evaluations (Appendix D), I coded their answers under the categories of advantages or disadvantages of observing peers' social interactions. Finally, I looked for and listed

agreement or disagreement of students' feedback on my monthly reflections about their oral English learning achievements and difficulties.

Phase Two of the Study

One year after phase one of the study, I returned to Wuhan University of Science and Technology. I had the opportunity to teach oral English to the same class of mechanical engineering students who had worked with me in phase one of my study. Although there were three new students who had transferred into the class from other departments, they maintained their English classes with their original teachers. Therefore, my entire class consisted of the original 39 students. Phase two of the study covered the Spring semester of 2012, 16 weeks total.

My action for phase two of the study was to maintain a communicative approach in class and to add more in-class activities. There were three after-class activities and 12 in-class activities. The adding of in-class activities was for the following purposes: examining students' social interaction characteristics for oral English learning; assessing if there was a development of students' oral communicative competence in an EFL environment and examining how they developed; and comparing rural, urban and minority students' responses to a communicative approach for oral English class.

Participants. Considering the class size, and the fact that I had to analyze students' social interaction characteristics and their oral communicative competence development, I chose ten students to focus on as my two sample groups for phase two of the study. There were several other factors that influenced my sampling choices. The first factor was related to the differences between rural versus urban students. As I have explained in my introduction, students from rural versus urban areas usually had different

learning resources (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Hu, 2002; Nunan, 2003) and, therefore, different learning experiences at their secondary levels. My interest was to find out how, with different learning backgrounds, students from rural versus urban areas responded to a communicative approach in an oral English class. Another factor I needed to consider was my new experience with minority students. Before phase one of the study, I seldom taught students from minority areas. Unlike the university where I had worked for ten years, which mainly accepts students from one province, WUST accepts students from all over the country. Because of WUST's broader acceptance policy, I had four minority students in one class. All four minority students were from rural areas. Three of them were from minority X and one was from minority Y. I used minority X and Y to protect students' identification. Including them in my sample helped me to better understand my new experience with this group of students. The third factor was the consideration of the rural and urban student ratio in my class. I have mentioned that there were 26 rural students and 13 urban students in this class. My sample groups included seven rural students and three urban students, which basically reflected an average distribution of urban and rural students among the groups. In the end, my two sample groups had five students in each, representing the diversity and ethnic make-up of my class (Table 2). Students' names are pseudonyms.

Table 2

Sample Students' Demographic Information

Group A	Name	Region	Sex	Ethnicity
Student 1	Rui	Urban	Male	Han majority
Student 2	Ke	Urban	Female	Han majority
Student 3	Huan	Rural	Male	Han majority
Student 4	Ai	Rural	Male	X minority
Student 5	Hong	Rural	Male	X minority
Group B	Name	Region	Sex	Ethnicity
Student 6	Yu	Rural	Male	Han majority
Student 7	Tao	Rural	Male	X minority
Student 8	Wan	Rural	Male	Han majority
Student 9	Bin	Urban	Male	Han majority
Student 10	Ping	Rural	Male	Y minority

I taught my class oral English for 100 minutes per week. Because these science students had fieldwork during the first month of the Spring semester, phase two of the study started from March 11th and ran through June 28th, 2012.

Data collection. In phase two of my action research, I studied students' oral communicative competence development and compared how students with different backgrounds responded to a communicative approach. I also included both students' and my perspectives in the data collection. I summarize my data collection for phase two in Table 3 and provide a detailed explanation.

Table 3

Data Collection For Phase Two Of The Study

Time	Teacher's perspective	Students' perspectives
Every week	Audio recordings and field notes; transcription/summary of field notes; reflections of student journal exchanges.	Quick writes in journals
Every two weeks		Self-reports (Appendix B)
Week 5 and week 15		Questionnaires (Appendix E)

EFL teacher's perspective. In order to collect students' social interactions data in class, I used audio recording and field notes to record their social interactions. I used audio recordings to record students' oral English social interaction and my field notes to focus on my sample students' non-verbal social interactions, such as body language and eye contact. As an EFL teacher and researcher, I could only focus on one sample group at a time. At the end of the week, I transcribed students' oral English conversations with the help of audio recordings and sorted through my field notes using two categories: non-verbal speaking strategies and peer encouragement. I kept exchanging journals with every student in my class, but paid extra attention to my ten sample students, especially the minority students. Teaching minority students was a challenge for me. Before I started teaching, my colleagues kindly reminded me that I should be cautious with my words and actions so as to avoid offending certain minority religious beliefs. I used personal journal exchanges as a means to better understand the minority students' learning histories and

family backgrounds. Every week, I reflected about journal exchange content with my sample students, such as how motivation worked in their oral English learning.

Students' perspectives. I collected students' perspectives in phase two of the study through the following means. Students wrote journals to me at the beginning of every class to ask me questions or reflect on our oral English class. Every other week, at the end of class, I asked them to fill out self-reports (Appendix B, same form as the phase one of the study) to reflect their oral English learning achievements, difficulties and expectations. In order to investigate students' understanding of the concept of oral communicative competence, I conducted the same questionnaire (Appendix E) twice on week five and week 15 with every student in class during the semester, but my data analysis was focused on my two sample groups only.

Data analysis. To analyze my sample students' social interaction characteristics and to monitor their oral communicative competence development, I applied various theoretical frameworks from cognitive and sociocultural perspectives on social interactions as well as for communicative and strategic competence (Table 4).

Table 4

<i>Various Theoretical Frameworks For Data Analysis</i>	
Data analysis perspectives	Framework content
Cognitive perspective of social interactions	Long (1980): comprehension checks, confirmation checks, clarification requests Swain (1983): comprehensible output
Sociocultural perspective of social interactions	1. Vygotsky(1978): ZPD–collaboration and assistance. 2. Foster and Ohta (2005): co-construction, self-correction, other-correction and encouragement. 3. Tharp and Gallimore (1991): modeling, feeding back, contingency managing, directing, questioning, explaining, and task structuring.
Communicative competence	Canale and Swain (1980): grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competence.
Strategic competence	Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1995): achievement, reduction, stalling, self-monitoring and interactional strategies.

Cognitive perspective of students’ social interactions. To analyze students’ cognitive perspective of social interactions, I mainly depended on my field notes and transcriptions from my audio recordings. I referenced Long’s work on meaning negotiation features to look for students’ English social interaction utterances, indicating

confirmation checks, comprehension checks and clarification requests. I also referenced Swain's work to look for examples of meaning negotiation indicating students' production of comprehensible output.

Sociocultural perspective of social interactions. To analyze students' social interaction characteristics from a sociocultural perspective, I referenced Vygotsky's concept of the ZPD to examine collaborations and assistance using two categories: students with peers and students with teacher. In analyzing students' collaborations and assistance with peers, I referenced Foster and Ohta's (2005) classification of co-construction, self-correction or other-correction and encouragement. I looked for data from my transcripts to show how students co-constructed their social interactions, self-corrected or received corrections from other speakers. Through my field note summaries, I coded data for two categories: verbal encouragement and non-verbal encouragement, to indicate how students encouraged peers during the social interaction process. For students' feedback through self-reports (Appendix B) and journals, I mainly looked for their reflections of what they did in collaboration with peers to contribute to group or pair work and for their comments about their peers' assistance and help.

In analyzing the collaboration process between students and myself, I referenced Tharp and Gallimore's (1991) classification of the seven categories of assistance for teaching: I categorized my field note summaries into these seven categories to answer what my role was during students' social interaction processes. I also read students' journals to look for their reflections about what kind of help they appreciated and hoped for from me, putting everything into the categories.

Assessing students' oral communicative competence development. First, I used Canale and Swain's (1980) communicative competence framework as an assessment standard. Through the transcripts, I summarized examples that indicated students' grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competence development. Second, for assessing students' strategic competence development, I further referenced Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell's (1995) classification of speaking strategies. I also coded students' self-reports (Appendix B) and journals by categories of their reflected learning achievements, difficulties or expectations regarding grammar, sociocultural rules and rules of discourse, and speaking strategies. Third, I checked students' understanding of the oral communicative competence concept. I coded my sample students' questionnaires (Appendix E) into five categories: grammar, speaking strategies, sociocultural knowledge, understanding input and suggestions for future development. Then I compared the questionnaires from week five and week 15.

Comparing rural, urban and minority students' responses. I looked back through all my field note summaries, my weekly reflections of students' journal content, sample students' self-reports (Appendix B) and student journals and to compare their responses to a communicative approach oral English class. I categorized my field note summaries and weekly reflections of students' journal content in terms of students' learning engagement and expectations during their social interaction processes. I categorized my sample students' self-reports (Appendix B) and journals according to how they performed and collaborated with peers and their expectations for oral English learning. For minority students, I mainly collected the data through journal exchanges. Through my weekly self-reflection of students' journal content, I compared their English

learning history at the secondary level and their learning expectations for oral English class at college level.

Limitations of Research

The first limitation was that my data collection and analysis might not be absolutely complete due to my researcher's role as the teacher, as an "insider" (Anderson, Herr & Nihlen, 2007, p. 2). Teaching and researching in my own classroom influenced the completeness of my data collection. Action research, like all other kinds of research, requires collecting and sorting through data. I found that sometimes collecting data and teaching at the same time were challenging, because I became so involved in teaching that I would occasionally forget to take field notes for my research. Teaching and collecting data simultaneously would sometimes cause me to miss data that I would have liked to collect.

The assumptions associated with my insider's role may also have limited my data analysis. For practitioner action research, Anderson and Herr (1999) state: "School practitioners have a personal stake and substantial emotional investment in their projects" (p. 13). Therefore, it is possible that some educators entering a research program try to purposely prove their assumptions about their students' learning and their own teaching practice (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007). I did make certain assumptions about my students' learning during the research process. For example, in the beginning I assumed that every student was eager to learn oral English. Because of this, when analyzing my data, my assumption might have pushed me to look for positive signs, proving students' interest in learning oral English, and so I might have overlooked some negative signs of their resistance to learning.

Subjectivity inevitably shaped my teacher research. Peshkin (1994) defines researcher's subjectivity as dynamic and composed of researcher's emotion, history and biography. Researcher's subjectivity is a "personal composite of dispositional and deterministic orientations" (p. 55). In addition, stereotyping of my students could have prevented me from seeing the research problem from a deeper level (Anderson & Herr, 1999). Since I had not been raised with or taught minority students before doing this research, I did not realize that they might have a different attitude about having to learn English nor did I anticipate what might make learning English more difficult for them.

The other limitation for this research was that students' heavy study loads made it difficult for them to spend a sufficient amount of time to reflect on their oral English learning, which might have influenced the depth of their learning reflections. It also made it difficult for me to spend after-class time observing my students' oral English learning activities. In most Chinese universities, as I know them, the Academic Affairs Office arranges a universal course schedule for same major students. At WUST, my students had an average of ten courses per week, an extremely heavy schedule. Most weekdays, they attended classes and always had a mountain of homework. My students told me that their homework load was so huge that they needed more time to turn in their self-reflection reports or questionnaires. Meanwhile, though students worked in groups after class, I had a very difficult time being there and observing their after-class group work, because I lived far away from them (I lived on the old campus and students lived on the new campus). Since I did not have an office on the new campus, and I needed to ride a bus for one hour to get from the new campus to the old one, I found it was difficult for me to stay around and join with my students in any after-class activities. The lack of extra

and or common time for my students and me to meet after class limited the possibilities of more interaction, observations or reflections during our research process.

Another limitation regards the support that I had received for my research. In order to analyze the collected data more scientifically and critically, I needed my colleagues' and students' input and feedback. In China, the relationship between teachers and students is hierarchical, and students are educated to listen to teachers and respect them. When I asked for their written opinions, such as in filling out self-reports (Appendix B), because of the traditional hierarchical relationship, they might have had the tendency to give opinions that they felt would match the researcher's (teacher's) expectation. Some students, those who really did not want to participate in the research, might have worried about their grade because of their non-participation. However, I found that journal exchanges with my students were truly helpful in solving the limitation caused by students having a tendency to meet teacher's expectations. Because in the journals the students and I maintained a fair, equal and trusting relationship, they seemed to feel safe enough to speak their minds.

Though my action research was an individual researcher activity, in order to achieve meaningful transformation of the traditional educational practice, I also needed my colleagues' support. However, most of my Chinese colleagues had very full teaching schedules, so they had very little time to spend with my research and me. Not being able to share research with peers limits the social interaction necessary for teachers to learn from and support each other. Fortunately, the university held an open attitude toward my research. I kept my UNM advisors in New Mexico informed on my research progress.

Discussions with professors helped me step out of the insider role to analyze my research data.

The last limitation was about the lack of learning resources available for the research. Since the students were learning in an EFL environment, their English learning resources were never ideal. We used various communicative activities to practice oral English in class and after class; however, the limited learning resources made it difficult for us to explore communicative activities that reflected more than just a few English-speaking contexts. The non-ideal learning environment certainly would have limited the range and variety of our research activities.

Chapter Four: Discussion and Findings

Phase One of the Study

When I first met my students, they were sitting quietly in a new, but traditional style classroom. All the tables and chairs were distributed in rows and fixed to the floor. I began by speaking English, introducing myself and the study that they were going to go through with me: applying a communicative approach in groups and pairs. While I was speaking, I noticed that some students were having a difficult time understanding me. After I had finished talking, half of my students looked at each other, sighed and complained that they could not understand most of what I had said. At that moment, I realized that class size and teaching resources would be the least of my concerns; there was much more to worry about. Students' resistance to the new methodology and their limited oral English training experiences were my biggest challenges. However, they told me that they admired the fact that I was able to speak English so fluently and suggested that I should speak English as much as possible, because it would be very helpful for them in learning how to speak English and for practicing their listening ability.

I regained confidence after investigating students' oral English learning history and their learning interest and expectations. During phase one of the study, students practiced various communicative activities, such as role plays, drama and presentations using diverse topics in groups or pairs, all of which produced social interactions; such interactions were usually missing in a traditional rote learning Chinese classroom.

Setting up class instruction to promote students' social interactions for oral English learning. For phase one of the study, with a theoretical foundation of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, regarding the primacy of social interaction on human

mental development, I structured an oral English class with a collaborative, communication-oriented approach for the purpose of promoting learners' oral English social interactions in an EFL environment. However, it was challenging for us at the beginning.

Resistance and reassurance. In the first class, after I introduced my teaching plan, students got their turn to ask me questions about our speaking and listening course. Even though they were allowed to ask me questions in Chinese, not many students were brave enough to ask questions; however, among the five questions that I did get, three of them were related to their CET-4 test: "How should I prepare for CET-4? My listening is poor, and the CET-4 tests listening. Do you have any suggestion? Could you assign homework for us to prepare for the CET-4 tests"? When I was answering these three questions, I noticed that most students showed great interest in listening to my answers; some students were even ready to take notes on what I was going to say. I was surprised that in a speaking and listening class, students did not show much interest in speaking English. I understood that without passing the CET-4 test, they could not graduate. Still, I knew that China had increasingly enlarged international cooperation with the world, so students talented in oral English were in demand; therefore, the development of oral English competence should have been of concern to most college students. I was frustrated and began to doubt my assumption that students required and desired oral English development. It seemed that my students showed great concern about the CET-4 test and had little interest in speaking or communicating in English for our course. Also, many students told me they had a difficult time understanding me, because their former English teacher never taught English using English; however, they still insisted that I

should speak English as much as possible, because it was beneficial for their listening practice for CET-4 preparations.

I regained my courage after conducting a survey of students' oral English learning history, interest and expectations (Appendix A). All 39 students turned in their questionnaires. The survey results lessened my frustrations and explained the puzzling student attitude of our first meeting. The majority of students explained their understanding of the importance of oral English: 17 students regarded that oral English was as important as English writing, listening and reading; 18 students felt that oral English was more important than reading, writing, and listening. The learning history findings indicated that their oral training at the secondary level was scarce, so they had no idea of how to "learn" to speak English. The results showed that 32 students never had or had little oral English training before entering college; "reciting English articles" and "reading aloud" were the main experience that they had had for their oral English learning. For the seven students who stated having oral English training experience, the training methods were "talking to their English teacher and answering teacher's questions in English." I realized that most students had not yet gained enough knowledge and experience in oral English training to feel comfortable with the methodology I had been describing to them. Add the pressure of a CET-4 certificate (mainly focuses on listening, writing and reading) to graduate, and it was not difficult for me to understand why students showed little concern about English speaking in the first class.

The survey also showed me that most students did have strong expectations to develop their English speaking ability. According to the survey, 36 students said they hoped to improve their oral English development. In addition, 25 students told me

through their journals that they hoped someday they would speak English as well as I do. The data showed that the three top expectations for learning oral English were: having an advantage in looking for jobs, working in an international company, and studying and travelling abroad. The findings confirmed my assumption of students' career requirements pressuring the development of their oral English. With a clear understanding of students' oral English history and expectations, we started a series of changes in class: students began working in groups and pairs and practicing communicative activities.

Dividing a large class into small groups or pairs. There are three factors that determined the need for group and pair work for the purpose of promoting my students' social interactions in an EFL environment. First, the characteristics of oral speech determine the necessity for small groups in my oral language class. Vygotsky (1987) states that oral speech entails dialogic social interaction because: "dialogue presupposes visual perception of the interlocutor (of his mimics and gestures) as well as an acoustic perception of speech intonation" (p. 271). He adds that "in contrast to monologue and written speech in particular, dialogic social interaction implies immediate expression. Dialogue is speech that consists of rejoinders. It is a chain of reactions" (p. 272). Halliday (1994), from a linguistic perspective, states that spoken language is a flowing dynamic interchanging process, whereby each individual utterance "provides a context for the next one, not only defining its point of departure but also setting the conventions by reference to which it is to be interpreted" (p. 61). Both writers mention that a central feature of oral language is social interaction or language interchange. If we maintain the pedagogy of whole-class organization and keep all the students working separately, we

would obviously overlook the basic feature of oral language: the requirement of social interaction between speakers; not to mention the involvement of students facing each other and observing and learning from their facial expressions or body language.

Breaking the whole class into small groups/pairs gave my students opportunities to start face-to-face oral communications in English.

Second, consideration for breaking a big class into small groups is also related to the amount of assistance students can receive. Tharp and Gallimore (1988) suggest that in classes where there are a lot of students, teachers have a difficult time assessing each student's ZPD and interacting individually to offer assistance; therefore, teachers can organize small groups, so that peers can assist performance and help maintain a positive learning atmosphere. Dividing students into small groups in class offered them opportunities to help one another.

Another reason for dividing the class into small groups was consideration for the limited time we had in class. Small units were necessary for our limited class time, because multiple conversations could all start at the same time, and so students would have more time to communicate with each other, instead of waiting for the chance to talk to the teacher.

I have mentioned in Chapter Three that I randomly divided students into seven groups since they were freshmen and new to each other. These seven groups were kept throughout both phases of my dissertation study. All groups finished the many class activities: debate, drama, PowerPoint presentation, role-play scenarios, movie retelling, and poster-design competition. Actually, students told me later they kept the same group structure for their other course assignments as well (other teachers and classes). Pair

(usually students formed pairs within their own group) and individual work under teacher direction was also applied in class, but my class structure and organization were primarily concerned with formal group and pair work.

Applying communicative oral activities. After the groups were set up, engaging them in different communicative-oriented oral language activities was yet another challenge. There were three factors that I had to consider for class activities. First, I had to think about my students' current oral language levels. Through the questionnaire (Appendix A), I found that most of my students (32 out of 39) had no previous oral English training; I had to be careful not to overwhelm them or to diminish their confidence and interest in doing activities in class. Second, since I agree with the idea that for any successful communication to occur, "there must be attentiveness and involvement in the discourse itself by all participants" (Varonis & Gass, 1985, p. 82), our class activities should be interesting enough to ensure students' active participation. As a final consideration, I had to decide whether there was enough time for me to apply the chosen activities in class. Our weekly class time of 200 minutes (training for all our language skills) was still very limited for 39 students if they were all going to participate in every class activity.

During phase one of the study, my students ended up having two categories of oral activities: in-class activities and after-class activities. In-class activities were usually conducted under my direction. Students either worked in groups, pairs, or individually (seldom). They were not given much time to prepare for their in-class presentations. They had to quickly discuss and negotiate what the in-class presentation would be about and who would lead. As their EFL teacher, I supervised them using oral English in class as

much as possible. After-class activities, such as drama and PowerPoint productions and presentations, required students to prepare for their class presentations outside the classroom. Otherwise, they would find that class time and resources were not sufficient for their preparations. They were required to speak English to prepare for their activities, but I had no way to make certain they would speak only English for the after-class preparations.

In-class activity. +Role plays using various scenarios (some from their textbooks) and group discussions based on current events, provided by available English language sources, were the main in-class activities. Role plays that students practiced included scenarios such as: inviting friends to dinner or a party; asking for directions; talking with customer service staff from department stores, etc. The group discussions covered topics, such as the generation gap, the harm of smoking, how to make a good impression, etc. Conducting job interviews in English was one activity from our textbook. This activity greatly attracted students' interest, because according to the questionnaire results (Appendix A), gaining an advantage in job seeking and working in an international company were the first two expectations for students' to learn oral English. Learning how to participate in an interview in English is necessary for applying to an international company.

Considering the fact that students had little or no experience of what a job interview in an English speaking context might be like, I gave lectures on English language social manners and speaking routines for interview preparation, all referenced in our textbook. Then I asked for volunteers from each group to engage in a job interview with me as a means of showing them what to expect. The whole class decided on the

different job positions we would interview for, and we wrote them on the whiteboard. This imagining of job positions created a more vivid social life context for them. I modeled the interview conversation seven times in class with seven different groups. All seven conversations went smoothly; one conversation made the class atmosphere especially active. In an interview with one young man, he told me that his wife knew my boss very well and that he hoped that I could understand what he meant. I was not prepared for his “hint”, and when students saw that I was somewhat startled, they all laughed. After a while, in an attempt to help me out of “trouble,” some students yelled: “Kick him out”! Other students said: “How dare you”? Some students said: “Fail him”! All was done in kindness. I was amazed that the students were so involved in observing our conversation, and my short-circuit moment offered them the opportunity to communicate using English in a natural way. After several interview demonstrations, I asked students to conduct English language interviews in pairs.

A poster design competition was another in-class activity. I connected students’ concerns as reflected through their journals with a poster design competition. As freshmen in college, my students gained the most freedom that they had ever had; they were living away from their parents and needed to learn self-planning and organizing skills. Students felt lost because they suddenly had to be responsible for everything that had previously been arranged by their parents and teachers. I saw my students’ concerns and worries in their journals, and so, as a class, we decided to have a poster-designing competition with a theme of “how to be successful in college.” The students had a reading passage as an information resource. This poster-designing competition was completed in class with a sequence of oral English planning, discussion and presentation.

I asked students to work in groups and provided markers, paper and some old magazines for them. They were asked to read passages individually first, then to use English to discuss how to design a poster with the theme of “how to be successful in college.” After they finished their design, groups presented their posters to the class. At the end of the presentations, I decided which group produced the best poster.

After-class activities. In phase one of the study, my students conducted after-class activities four times, one was a PowerPoint presentation and three were drama productions. The first after-class activity was the PowerPoint presentations. I assigned students the task of making PowerPoint presentations about any theme they liked. They were given two weeks to prepare, but they could not bring any scripts for their presentations. About half a week after the assignment was given, several students sent me text messages complaining that it was too difficult for all their group members to show up at the same time to use the computer (as freshmen only a few students had computers and the computer lab was mainly used for students’ listening practice). Therefore, I tried another solution: re-forming the groups so that each dorm became a group. Three girls now became a single group. Ten dorms should have presented their projects; however, one dorm did not present at all due to not getting along very well. Out of nine projects, six were related to students’ Chinese culture. They mostly targeted western audiences, introducing the Great Wall, China, the Moon-cake festival, Hong Kong, Chinese Gongfu (Martial arts) movies and their lives in childhood.

Another after-class activity, drama, was added to my class instruction at the finish of the PowerPoint presentations. The choice of drama as a pedagogical tool for second language learning is not new (Dunn, Bundy & Woodrow, 2012; Wessels, 1987). Wessels

(1987) summarizes some of the benefits of using drama for second language development:

(a) achievement of meaningful interaction using the target language; (b) fully contextualized and interactional use of the language; (c) acquisition of new vocabulary and structure in a contextualized format; (d) improvement in students' self-confidence in the use of the target language. The first two productions of the students' drama activity were all from existing Chinese and foreign fairytales. For the last set of drama productions, I encouraged students to design and write their own scripts. I list their original work as follows:

1. A farmer was "begging" for the money that he should have been paid by his boss, so he could pay his son's tuition for college.
2. Boys were discussing whether they should look for a beautiful girlfriend or a smart girlfriend.
3. One section of the *Journey to the West*, a famous Chinese fairytale story with their newly added content.
4. Educating classmates not to be absent from classes.
5. As a girl was waiting for a school bus, several boys attempted to start conversations with her.
6. Students were sitting on the playground and talking about how to deal with their free time in college.
7. While having dinner, students were comparing the college campus and dorms with their high school campus and dorms.

Throughout phase one of the study, my students maintained practicing communicative activities in consistent groups/pairs both inside and outside of the class.

Findings from Phase One of the Study

The action for phase one of the study was applying communicative activities in groups and pairs in a large-sized class. Therefore, through my data analysis, I summarized my findings from the perspectives of group or pair work in communicative activities. When I refer to students' journals or self-report (Appendix B) content, all names are reported as pseudonyms.

The efficacy of group or pair work for students' oral English learning.

During the process of phase one of the study, most activities were conducted in the same seven groups that I randomly divided at the beginning of the semester. We only changed the group formation for one after-class activity: PowerPoint presentations (week nine). This was done for the convenience of common time and computer usage. After the PowerPoint presentations, 26 students reflected in their journals that they felt more comfortable working with their original groups. After going through their journals, I found there were two major reasons for students' preference for their original groups. First, students reflected that they could not get along with their roommates. Usually, in Chinese universities, all students are required to live on campus. Each department arranges dorms for students, and students usually are not allowed to switch dorms or move out. I have mentioned above that one dorm did not participate in this PowerPoint presentation. From their journals (December 3, 2010), four boys from that dorm reflected that they had not talked to each other for a while. Second, of those groups who did present, some group members were heavily dependent on the roommates and shared fewer responsibilities. This was because they were so close to each other, and it was difficult to just say "No" to a friend. Students wrote entries in their journals, such as: "I

didn't spend too much time for this activity. Rui finished the PowerPoint slides, I only took a look. I didn't learn too much this time" (Zan, December 3, 2010). "I stayed up until midnight and they were all busy with their own homework. It's hard for me to ask their help" (Rui, December 3, 2010). "Whatever I say, they all agree and they leave me to do the work" (Jun, December 3, 2010). "I like discussing with my classmates, but they think I can make the decision" (Yang, December 3, 2010). At this point, the students and I decided that the original groups worked better for their learning. Therefore, we changed the groups back to the original seven groups for the remainder of the semester's activities. Through my data analysis for phase one of the study, I found group or pair work promoted students' social interactions in the following ways.

Group or pair members' trust promotes social interaction. I have observed group members building trust in their groups throughout the semester. In reviewing my monthly summaries, based on field notes and audio recordings, I found that at the beginning stage of phase one of the study, groups were much less talkative as a whole. Most times, students with advanced speaking levels dominated group work. Gradually, students became more active within their groups and I saw more body language and heard more laughter as the group members formed trusting relationships and became teams. By the end of phase one of the study, every group had named themselves as they became a working team, names such as: Dreamer; Five Wolves; Red Bulls; Kites; Swift; Challenge; Mountain. Meanwhile the audio recordings and my field notes showed that, over time, more students felt comfortable asking for group members' help. Beginning in week seven, the most frequent statements were: "Why is that? How to say...? I don't understand, you speak slowly". Meanwhile, I also found more encouragement happening

inside the group, with students saying such things as: “Come on, have a try! You can do it! I told you can do it.” Instead of sitting quietly inside the group as they did at the beginning stage of the semester, more students participated in their group discussions.

Students’ reflections indicated their increasing comfort working as a group. Through students’ self-reports (Appendix B), I noticed that at the beginning of the semester, most students reflected that their learning difficulties were that they felt “funny” or “strange” to speak English in front of their classmates. They worried that their pronunciations were not standard, feeling that nobody could understand them and might laugh at them. In the later reflections, they commented on the high value of group work as it relates to their learning process. They noted that, when talking and acting with group members, they were less nervous and they had the confidence to face learning difficulties as a group. Towards the end of the semester, more students also reflected in their journals their ease of speaking inside the group. Students wrote “I made mistakes in the group, they just laughed. I am not angry, it’s funny. Everyone make mistakes. I laugh when other classmates made mistakes, too” (Nie, December 17, 2010). “If teacher asked me to answer questions, I am nervous and everyone is looking at me. I speak inside the group, everyone is speaking, no one is the focus” (Tan, December 24, 2010). It seems that engendering trust between group members produced an easy environment in which students could talk to each other in English and, more importantly, allow them to stop worrying about losing face and not feel threatened by other speaker’s competence (Varonis & Gass, 1985) and therefore promoted their social interaction opportunities.

Group competition promotes social interaction efficiency. All of my after-class activities and one in-class activity, poster design, included group competitions. I found

the competitive spirit of one group trying to outperform the other groups was very strong, and therefore promoted students' oral English social interaction efficiency. For instance, drama activity greatly motivated students' oral English learning. I still recall that, just before the drama performance event, students were actively rehearsing in the classroom; they even brought props that they had made for their drama, though I had never mentioned props as part of the assignment. They were all completely engaged in their performance, intent on the roles they must play.

Students demonstrated their effort to win group competition through both their work and reflections. According to two times for their group reports (Appendix C) from week 11 and 15, all seven groups reflected that they had spent many after-class hours practicing their roles for the drama competition. When I shared my monthly reflections with my students about how drama could unite groups and make them tighter, I found that students agreed with my reflections in their journals. One student wrote in his journal: "This time, every one inside the group tried his best. We want to be NO.1" (Wan, December 31, 2010). After the first drama presentations (week 11), 23 students reflected in their journals that they hoped for more competitive activities in class.

The group competition not only promoted students' social interactions for oral English learning, it also caused them to closely observe peers' oral English social interactions. My field notes from week 11, 13 and 15 showed that the drama competition was very effective in attracting audience group members' attention. Students' curiosity about who would win the competition kept the class attentive throughout all of the presentations. Nobody was playing with cell phones in class when other groups were performing their drama scenes; students leaned forward, so that they were able to observe

better. My audio recordings also showed that there was little noise when groups were presenting. After the drama presentations were finished, students reflected (Appendix D) on the benefits of observing peers' presentations, benefits such as learning useful English expressions, i.e. "a piece of cake" and "mind your own business"! They also reported that their listening comprehension had improved, because they did not focus exclusively on peers' oral English alone, but employed additional input, such as body language and artifacts to aid in their understanding.

Group work routine saving class time promotes more social interactions. Due to extensive group work, students became used to working with each other in familiar ways; knowing the basic routine as a group insider saved students a lot of precious class time, a resource best used to practice oral English social interactions. In addition, various class activities were conducted using group presentations, this became routine and so anticipated by the class. Student familiarity with class routines and student knowledge of what to expect in a language class can also save a lot of precious class time as well.

According to my field notes, after a couple of weeks (four times meeting with me) training, my students were fully engaged in class routine. There were always seven groups sitting together and they were usually engaged in class work. In each group, the members sat close to each other, so that they could immediately start their activity for the day. At the beginning of each Friday class, they were expecting to receive feedback that I returned to them in their journals and they also wanted to add to their journals as well. One time, because I had two colleagues observing my class at the same time, I skipped journal writing at the beginning of the class; students soon reminded me that they had not written in their journals yet. In our every other Tuesday class, I always allowed about ten

minutes for students' reflections. Students were not using the "extra time" to gossip, instead they exercised their habit of filling out self-reports (Appendix B).

The efficacy of communicative activities for students' oral English learning.

After my students practiced communicative activities, both in class and after class such as role plays, drama, presentations with various themes and story retelling, I found communicative activities promoted students' social interactions in the following ways.

Choosing appropriate communication needs. Communicative activities enabled students to play active roles choosing appropriate English communicative needs when facing diverse social interaction requirements. Students could choose an appropriate level of difficulty for their social interactions, so as to more easily achieve social interaction efficiency. Speaking tasks that were too difficult could easily stop their oral English social interactions. According to my audio recordings and field notes, most of my students' English social interactions were short sentences. The most frequent English tenses they used were present continuous, present and past tense. The first two times we had the drama activity, all seven groups chose only existing fairy tale stories, such as: "Wolf is Coming; Three Pigs; The Emperor and the Cloth." The third time, with my encouragement, they came up with their own original scripts. My students' English speaking characteristics (short sentences and a few tenses) and their choices for speaking content indicated that they only felt comfortable speaking simple English in phase one of the study. One in-class activity, poster design, highlighted students' social interactions demonstrating clearly how they chose the appropriate level for their communication needs when facing diverse social interaction requirements. Groups were asked to design posters about their ideas on the meaning of "college success", and then present their

posters in a class competition. They had been assigned reading passages from their textbooks as a discussion reference. I expected that students would discuss “college success” with their group peers, but they did not engage in much social interaction on this subject in meeting EFL teacher’s requirement, even though they had been given reading passages as reference. According to my field notes from week ten, I observed that students mainly discussed how they should design their posters, such as which picture should be used, where to arrange the pictures on the poster, and what color highlighter should be used. Meanwhile, I observed that in the process of students’ communications, they resorted to additional resources to help in their speaking and understanding. For example, if they wanted to say “diligent,” they looked at a picture and explained: “Like this picture, he is working continuously. There is no rest for him. We should study like this”! It seemed that artifacts worked as a kind of scaffolding for their English output. From students’ self-reports (Appendix B), they also reflected their difficulties talking about the topic “success”. Students wrote: “Success is too abstract. I can’t explain it in Chinese; it is more difficult for me to explain it in English” (Li, November 9, 2010); “Designing the poster is easy for me to describe. If I speak success, I have to recite from the passage”(Wu, November 9, 2010). Most students’ reflected that using artifacts, such as pictures from magazines, facilitated their speaking.

Systematically planning and organizing social interactions. Communicative activities enabled students to actively prepare for their oral English social interactions by cooperating with group members and organizing their own learning schemes in complete and systematic ways. Rogoff (1990) discusses the importance of involving learners in the whole activity process. She asserts that such involvement offers learners a chance to see

“how the steps fit together and to participate in aspects of the activity that reflect the overall goals, gaining both skills and a vision of how and why the activity works” (p. 95). Students’ systematically planning and organizing their communicative activities enabled them to become more responsible for their own social interactive learning and to build a clearer understanding of social interaction functions. During in-class activities, I observed at the beginning of the semester, when groups first started working together, that they had a tendency to write their English conversations on paper before speaking. I encouraged them to stop writing before speaking and to discuss and converse in oral English only. With the development of phase one of my study, according to the monthly summary of my field notes, I found students’ preparations for in-class activities mainly happened in the following sequence: distributing roles, brainstorming the speaking context, short practice session with peers’ help and presenting in front of the class.

After-class activities played an especially important role in students’ learning planning and self arrangement. After analyzing students’ group reports (Appendix C), I saw that students’ reflections on organizing their after-class activities were similar in many ways: deciding on a theme, collecting data, discussing presentation details, making notes, and reviewing the presentation. Although I had no way to guarantee students would speak only English in their after class preparations, it’s important to note that in order to finish a presentation, students had to organize their learning tasks in a systematic way. By planning themes, discussing presentation details, collecting resources and implementing plans, students experienced the whole learning process. They divided their work into several steps and for each step they had to resort to outside learning resources, which was very necessary for learning English in an EFL environment. Through this

after-class activity, they developed skills for organizing learning tasks in a workable manner, negotiating with team members and using online resources in their learning process. One rural student who had never had a computer before college told me he did not learn how to make a PowerPoint through a computer course, but had learned it through peer collaboration in my class.

Actively reflecting on learning achievements, problems and expectations.

Following my suggestions, various communicative activities offered students multiple opportunities to reflect on their oral English social interactions. Students' reflections on their learning achievements motivated them to keep on practicing in social interactions for their development of oral communicative competence. Through their weekly journals, students could see their social interaction achievements. For example, after the PowerPoint presentations, students reflected that slides were very helpful for presenting their ideas; after drama activities, students reflected that body language assisted them in their social interactions; after I modeled a role-play conversation with my students, they reflected that knowing English language culture was important to avoid misunderstandings, such as not talking about someone's private business. At the end of the semester, the most frequent achievements students reflected through their journals were the improvement of their English listening comprehension, vocabulary and the confidence to speak English by working in groups. Seeing achievement greatly improved their learning interest. One student wrote, "at first, I treat it as a task, now I treat it as a (n) enjoyment" (Liu, January 7, 2011).

Students reflected their difficulties and expectations, which pointed us toward new activities for better social interactions between students. I used students' self-reports

(Appendix, B; 35 students turned in) from week four as an example. Those learning difficulties, as decided by my students, included: their poor vocabulary made it difficult to organize correct English sentences; they had difficulty expressing long and beautiful sentences because they could not recall enough grammar; they spent too much time trying to organize a correct sentence; and they were not satisfied with their pronunciations (not like the teacher's). Additionally, there were 29 students that reflected that their poor listening skills made understanding peers too difficult. It seemed that at the beginning of the semester, students' learning difficulties were primarily concerned with correct usage of English. Their concern regarding language correctness also influenced their confidence to speak. From the same self-reports (Appendix B), 17 students reflected that they dared not or were too shy to interact with classmates; 15 students reflected that they were too frustrated to continue speaking English, because their partners could not understand them. Students' reflections made me realize that as their teacher, I should provide more opportunities for students to practice with each other; also, I should more often encourage students to speak and to praise other's speaking, so as to lessen their nervousness to speak English.

Through self-reports (Appendix B), students also expressed their expectations for our English class. From week 6, when students had responded to my question of what kind of help they needed in the future, the most frequent answer was participating in more activities; they also listed what kind of activities they expected. Students wrote: "Let more students join it" (Zhu, November 23, 2010). "More speaking opportunities give me more confidence" (Chen, November 23, 2010). "I'm more interested in learning something that is not closely related to my life" (Tan, December 7, 2010). "I hope the

activities can be more challenging” (Ke, December 21, 2010). I saw their eagerness to participate in future activities.

Realizing EFL teacher’s assistance role. Communicative activities changed the EFL teacher’s dominant role in a traditional Chinese class. Instead of teacher-centered dominance, the EFL teacher worked as an assistant to facilitate students’ social interactions for oral English learning. My assistance was reflected in the following aspects: modeling, instructing and providing feedback. My English-speaking competence worked as a role model for most students. I told them that I had achieved my English speaking ability by communicating with others and that I constantly made speaking errors while communicating with others in English. Students began to realize that through communication, speaking fluently and expressing ideas clearly in English, speaking competence would also be possible for them.

While practicing conversations, in an imagined English context, I modeled appropriate social interactions with volunteers in class. With the help of our textbook, I first instructed/introduced a few English language speaking routines and some new vocabulary. Then, I started English practice conversations with volunteers. My modeling conversations with students were especially important for students who had little oral English learning experience. These students could observe my modeling, learn speaking routines in a context appropriate for learning oral English, and then practice their social interactions with each other. Whenever it appeared that I might have stumbled in my own oral English, the students would jump in quickly, playing active roles and attempting to help me out. For example, when I did not expect student’s response in a job interview, my student audience helped me out by saying, “how dare you? Fail him! Kick him out”!

I used this device more than a few times to gain their oral English social interaction interest.

When students began their group work, I walked around the classroom, making sure they spoke English as much as possible. I was there to offer help when students expressed difficulties. Usually they looked to each other first, then looked to me and smiled, but without directly asking me. I got the hint and asked: “What do you want to say”? Then one of the students asked: “How to say this in English”? I usually did not tell them the word or expression directly, but instead asked them to explain it. For example, in week 3, we had group discussions on the harm of smoking. When I talking to one group, I noticed they didn’t know how to say “suffocating.” One girl was trying to say people smoking on the bus made air more suffocating and made her dizzy. She asked me how to describe the bus air, I asked her to tell me an example. According to my field notes, she said “I hate people smoking in the bus. Bus was already crowed and their smoking stop (ped) me from breathing and feel (felt) dizzy” (Ke, October 19, 2010). She actually explained suffocating in English accurately. Based on her explanations, I taught the word “suffocating” to the group.

My feedback helped to improve students’ social interaction interest and confidence. I did not spend much time correcting students’ speaking errors, but instead gave them short, brief and positive feedback after they presented. I also gave positive feedback on in-class presentations to individuals through their journals. Usually my encouragement served to promote students’ learning interest and confidence. In fact, students really appreciated my efforts to do so. In such a large-sized class, students cherished their teacher’s concern for the individual learner. One student wrote to me in

his journal “I am happy you remember me. There are so many students. You remember what I did” (Zhang, November 26, 2010).

Referencing phase one of my study, I have found that group and pair work and communicative activities promote students’ oral English social interactions in an EFL environment. At the end of phase one of the study, we had a ceremony to consider all of the most touching moments during the semester. It was a happy party in which everyone was awarded for having contributed a touching moment to our class. Most of my students wrote that they had experienced a totally different way of learning English. To quote one of my students: “We need those activities to make a warm [learning] atmosphere” (Wang, January 4, 2011).

Phase Two of the Study

In the Spring semester of 2012, luckily, I managed to gain a second opportunity to go back to WUST to teach the same class that I had had for phase one of my study. It was a really precious chance; normally, in China, for non-English major college students, English is a compulsory course only for the first two years, and there are no English classes available for junior and senior college students unless English is their major. The class that I had taught a year ago had only one semester left for English learning, and I was graciously given the chance to teach them a speaking and listening course again.

On a cold gray winter afternoon, I showed up in the classroom without telling the students in advance that I was coming. All the students were surprised that I had come back; one girl cried when she saw me. They took turns telling me about their experiences when they had had to go back to the “old way” of learning oral English: mainly reading from the computer in a computer lab classroom; repeating and reciting dialogues from

textbooks. When I asked them whether they still remembered their old groups, the students immediately moved around, found their team buddies and regrouped. Even if I hadn't asked them to regroup, they had been waiting to do so. They shook hands, sitting very close to each other. Suddenly, the original seven groups were back together in the classroom.

As a spiraling and ongoing process, practitioner action research determines that in the process of action research, the next steps will be decided by the previous data collection and analysis (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007). After phase one of the study, I found that communicative activities in groups and pairs promoted students' social interactions for oral English learning. Students' social interactions changed them from the passive roles that they had been used to in traditional rote-learning classes. This was an improvement for teaching large-sized oral English classes in China. Learning from the improvements made in phase one of the study, in phase two, my applied action was to continue using communicative activities overall and add even more in-class activities.

Applying in-class activities in groups or pairs. In phase two of the study, students returned to their original seven groups and participated in 12 in-class activities and two after-class activities. The in-class activities covered various areas: information gap activities; activities which were related to target language life styles from the textbooks, such as conversations that might happen in a department store, a police station or a pharmacy; activities related to students' daily lives, such as group discussion of online shopping, part-time jobs and the necessity of graduate studies. For two of the after-class activities, the students requested dramas. As one student wrote in her journal when

suggesting drama activity for our class “drama will bring all good memoires back” (Ke, April 12, 2012).

Each week, I met students for two separate periods. Most in-class activities were conducted at the same time in the first period after students wrote in their journals for 10 minutes. Sometimes before their discussion, I would also give short lectures on cultural knowledge. In the second period, the seven groups took turns presenting their group discussions, after which I gave brief verbal evaluations. Every other week, at the end of class, they had to fill out self-reports (Appendix B).

During phase two of the study, for the purpose of studying students’ social interaction characteristics and assessing their oral communicative competence, I mainly depended on the transcriptions of students’ in-class conversations. I transcribed their conversations with the help of audio recordings and my field notes. In the following section, I describe how my focus groups practiced two kinds of communicative activities: target-language life-style activities and information gap activities. My description includes students’ English conversation transcription as well.

Practicing target-language life-styles activities. Canale and Swain (1980) wrote that “the primary objective of a communication-oriented second language program must provide the learners with information, practice and much of the experiences needed to meet their communicative needs in the second language” (p. 28). “Seeing a doctor” was a theme from students’ textbooks meant to help students practice a conversation in a western clinic. I gave a brief introduction of the procedure for seeing a doctor in America, first making an appointment, then the initial check by a nurse and afterward seeing the doctor. I asked students to work in groups to practice the whole procedure for seeing a

doctor in an imagined English-speaking environment. I chose Group A (five students) as my focus group and transcribed their conversations. They were two urban students: Ke and Rui; three rural students Huan, Ai and Hong. Ai and Hong are also minority students.

Group A was preparing for and rehearsing conversations that might happen in a school clinic. The only girl, Ke, started the conversation by saying, “I am sick, and I need my boyfriend to be with me.” The highly active boy standing next to her, Ai, immediately responded, “I’ll be your boyfriend,” and the other boys laughed at his instantaneous response to the girl. I observed that the team members were comfortable joking with each other. Immediately then, everyone asked for a role: Rui was the doctor; Huan was his assistant, but not a nurse. He explained that “I am a man; women are nurses. Assistant is a better name.” The last boy, Hong, had the weakest ability to speak, and he chose to make or find artifacts for aiding the conversations. He picked up a pen and said “for temperature.” He meant this pen could be used as a thermometer. After that, the team began communicating with each other and preparing for the role play. Below is their conversation transcript.

Ke: What kind of diseases should I have?

Ai: Headache.

Huan: Stomach ache.

Rui: Fever, dizzy.

Hong: Tired.

Rui: We should use them all in the conversation.

After students brainstormed all the possible illnesses they could think of, the next step was to make an appointment, for which students had no previous experience. Ke

(girl patient) looked at Ai (boyfriend), directing him with “I am too sick, you call.” At this point, Ai and the assistant student, Huan, had to make an appointment using English. Huan was a little bit nervous to suddenly be the focus of his group. He looked at his friend, Rui, who played the doctor. Rui smiled at him and patted him on his shoulder for encouragement. Then Ai and Huan started an English conversation, attempting to make an appointment to see a doctor.

Huan: Hello! Dragon Clinic! How can I help you?

Ai : Hello (slight pause). My girlfriend is sick.

Huan: Ok, please come here.

Ai: When and where?

Huan: Three this afternoon; at the right corner.

Ai: Corner? Which corner? I beg your pardon?

Huan looked at his other classmates; it seemed to be hard for him to continue. The girl Ke was helping him and directed him by saying “building 4, next to building 4.” Huan continued.

Huan: If you pass building 4, left, your left, a building is at the corner.

That’s us. You can see us.

Ai: Ok. Thank you. I will bring her to see you.

After Huan and Ai finished their conversation, I saw Huan was relieved.

His friend, Rui, who played the doctor, patted him again saying “good job”! Huan happily replied with a “thank you.”

Finally, this is the conversation that happened in the doctor’s office.

Rui: What’s matter with you?

Ai: My girlfriend has headache, stomach, fever.

Ke: Dizzy and tired (speaking in a faint voice pretending illness).

Rui: Open your mouth and say ah please (pretending to check the girl's tongue).
Ok, let me see, let me see (looking at his assistant Huan and nodding to him).

Huan: This is her record of all her illness (passing a notebook to Rui). She has a fever (passing a pen to Rui).

Rui: You had a cold. You need drink a lot of water and rest. I will write a ...
(pausing and looking at me). How to say that...giving medicine (asking his group members)?

Ke: You mean write down the medicine?

Rui: Yes, but there is an English word for that, there is an English word for that.

Ai: You want to say description?

Huan: Right, right, description, very close, but not.

Hong: (had no part): You mean Kai Yaofang? (Kai Yaofang is Chinese for prescription.)

Rui: Yes, but I don't know how to say it in English.
(Nobody in the group was able to come up with the word "prescription.")

Rui: (pretending to write something and then passing a piece of paper to Ke)
This is your medicine. Go home and take them three times a day. You will be fine.

Ke: (nodding) Thank you.

Ai: (looking at Ke) Let's go home. I will take good care of you.

The team laughed again and said to Ai, “you are so sweet”! In the end, I taught them the word “prescription” and told them this word was very similar to description, because we only needed to change the first letter to “pr” to describe what a doctor writes to tell a pharmacist which medicine you need and how it should be taken. They found my explanation was interesting and learned “prescription” immediately.

“Ordering in a western restaurant” was a theme that my students suggested for practice. There are a few differences between ordering in Chinese restaurants and western restaurants. I explained that in western restaurants, customers are usually be seated first and that customers should pay a “tip” (tipping is not practiced in China) at the end of the meal; I also introduced vocabulary for an assortment of western foods. After my short introduction, students were asked to practice their conversations in groups.

I observed how Group A prepared for their conversations, and I transcribed their conversations. Ai asked to be a waiter, and Ke asked to be a waitress. They decided that because business was very bad, there would be two people serving one table. Rui, Huan and Hong played the three customers. Here is their conversation transcript:

Ai: Welcome to Dragon restaurant. How many?

Rui: Three (Huan and Hong, nodding and smiling at Ai).

Ai: Table or booth?

Rui: Table or booth (asking Huan and Hong)?

Hong: Table, table. Ok (looking at Rui and Huan)?

Huan: Yes, table is ok.

Ai: Ok, ok, follow me, please.

Ai: What do you want to drink?

Hong: Mao Tai (a very expensive brand of Chinese alcohol.

The whole group laughed).

Ai: What do you want to eat?

Huan: Can you (looking at Rui), how to say help us order?

Ke: You want to say suggest? (Ke helped Huan out instead.)

Huan: I know a word, but suggest is ok. Can you suggest some dishes for us?

Ai: Qingzheng Luyu (a Chinese dish; he used Mandarin and the group laughed again).

Rui: What is that?

Huan and Hong: What is that (speaking almost simultaneously)?

Ai: Eh, eh, let me think, how to say it? (looking at Ke) How to say it?

Ke: Tell them how we make it.

Ai: Ok. Luyu is a fish, good fish, expensive fish. We put the fish on the (using body language to draw a circle indicating a steamer), pot, right, pot and steam it.

Huan: No taste?

Ai: Yes, yes, we add salt, oil...?

Ke: Ginger, and our own secret juice.

Ai: Right, we add salt, oil, ginger and our special and delicious juice.

Rui: Sounds good, we want this steamed fish.

Ai: You will like it. This steamed fish is very delicious.

Ai: What else do you want?

Huan: Dumpling, hamburger, sand..., sandwich (looking at his notebook).

Hong: Noodle, ice cream, Chao fan (Chinese for fried rice).

Rui: Yangzhou fried rice.

Hong: Yangzhou fried rice, that's it.

Ke: Please wait a minute. Your food will be ready soon.

(The three customers nodded at her. They moved on to the scene of the end of the meal. At the end of the imagined meal, Rui passed a note as a tip to Ai and Ke.)

Rui: Thank you for your service.

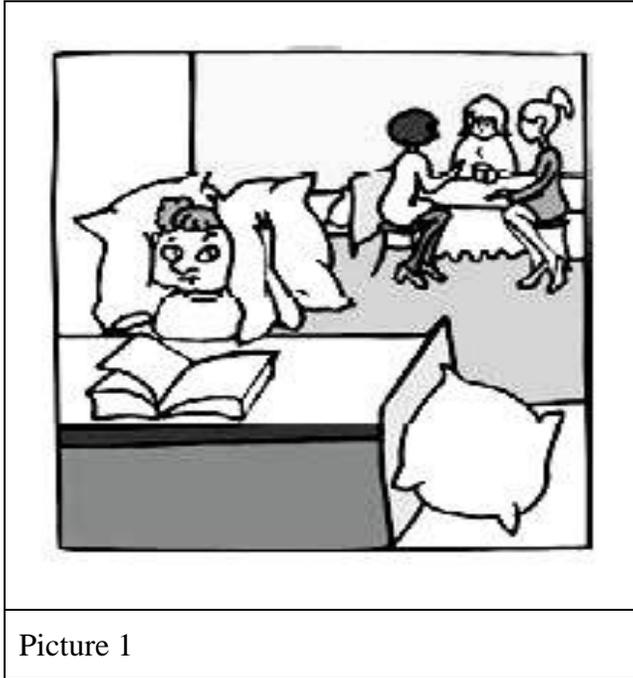
Hong: Thank you. I am full.

Ai: Thank you, you have a good night.

While Ai was saying “you have a good night,” he also bowed to his customers; the group ended their English conversation in laughter, they knew Americans do not bow!

Practicing information gap activities. Information gap tasks play a key role in second language learning (Foster & Ohta, 2005; Jenks, 2009; Pica, 2002). Foster and Ohta (2005) wrote that “information gap tasks transacted by dyads were likely to give the most opportunities for negotiation of meaning” (p. 405). Based on the efficacy of information gap tasks on second language learning, I introduced information gap activities to the class. These activities required pair work, so I asked my two focus groups (Group A and Group B) to sit closer, grouping ten students and then dividing them into five working pairs. I set them to work by referencing an online activity that required “describing and guessing” (Talking about Roommates Speaking Exercise, n.d.). Each student in the pair was given one unique picture depicting an imagined roommate’s behavior; their pair partners couldn’t see the other’s picture. Students were asked to describe the picture in hand without showing it, and their partners were asked to guess what kind of roommate was in the picture based on their description. I asked student pairs to take turns describing and guessing, so that every student in the pair experienced both describing and guessing. I focused on Group B. There were only five students in this group, and so I had to arrange for one student from Group B to work with a student from Group A. As a result, I observed three pairs of students working with this activity.

Pair one. There were two rural students in pair one: Yu and Tao, both of them from rural areas. Tao is a minority student. Yu described first (Picture 1) to Tao.



Yu needed to describe students' behavior in the picture and Tao had to guess what kind of roommates were shown in the picture, based on Yu's description. Tao could raise questions along the way. I hoped this activity would offer students opportunities to exchange information in English, because one partner had information the other partner didn't have. It was not a difficult picture and Yu looked at it for a couple of minutes and began to describe it. This is their transcript.

Yu: I start.

Tao: Ok.

Yu: Three girl are play mahjong.

Tao: Girls? Playing mahjong? Are you kidding?

Yu: Yes, girls are playing mahjong. Everyone likes it.

Yu: One girl is studying. He needs review the book. He, or sorry, sorry, she, she, (looking at me with a little embarrassment) used something to cover her head. What do you think? What kind of roommates are they?

Tao: Why she covered her head? Is she sleeping?

Yu: No, No, she is studying (using his hands to cover his ears). Like this, like this! Ear, ear! Not head! Sorry, (pause) sorry!

Tao: Ok, ok, I see, I see. She is covering her ears! Loud... noisy.

Yu: Right, I will say it again, you listen! A girl is studying; three other girls are playing mahjong. This girl didn't want to hear, so she is covering her ears. What do you think?

Tao: So, roommates are noisy and not thoughtful.

Yu: Very good!

Tao: Thank you!

After the students finished this conversation, I smiled at them and complimented them on their performance. Both of them smiled at me. Then Tao picked-up his picture (Picture 2) immediately and said to Yu, "Now, your turn to guess."



The following is the transcript of Tao's attempt at describing a picture while Yu guessed.

Tao: This one is easy. Listen carefully.

Yu: Speak slowly (looking at Tao).

Tao: Do you like sleep? Sorry, like sleeping?

Yu: Yes.

Tao: Do you want a quiet environment?

Yu: Yes, I turn off light too.

Tao: But someone is making noise, no... boys, usually boys making noise when sleeping.

Yu: I see, you mean roommates sleep and snoring.

Tao: I told you it is easy. When they are sleeping, they are snoring.

Yu: So, the picture is describing roommates sleeping and snoring.

Tao: Yes, right.

The two boys smiled at each other.

Pair two. In pair two, student Bin is from an urban area, while student Wan is from rural area. At the beginning, before their conversation, Bin told me in Chinese, “my English is really poor. I don’t know how to speak English.” At this comment, Wan patted Bin and said “it is a game. Have a try”! Wan began to describe (Picture 3).



Here is their conversation about a different picture.

Wan: Who guess who speak?

Bin: I, I guess.

Wan: Ok, I describe first. A boy has many things, such as computer, football, tennis, books, tennis and reading (acting out typing, kicking the balls, playing while describing the picture). (Then he paused for a while to look at Bin.)

Bin: (nodding, looking at Wan and me, smiling, no verbal response.)

Wan: He put everything in a big box. The box is really big, taller than me

(standing up). Wait a minute... wait (using his cell phone to check the word, and found the word “closet”). The box is closet, closet.

Bin: (shaking his head) I don't know.

Wan: (raising his volume) Everything is in the clo... closet (reading his note).

He didn't separate them. It's everywhere (acting, pushing everything into the closet). Every Thursday, Thursday afternoon, we have to clean our dorm (acting, sweeping the floor), because department checks. Before the check, we put things everywhere.

Bin: Dirty? Not clean?

Wan: Yes, some classmates don't like clean, no, no sorry, some classmates don't like cleaning. The dorm is very dirty.

Bin: Dirty. I don't like cleaning (looking at me and smiling).

Wan: Right, roommates don't like cleaning, they are messy.

Bin: Messy, messy. My mom said...I am messy.

Both of them looked at me and laughed. Now it's Bin's turn to describe (Picture 4) and Wan's to guess. Bin looked at me and Wan; Wan said to him, “if you don't know how to say, act, just like me.”



Here is the conversation transcript.

Wan: Are you ready?

Bin: Ye, ok.

Bin: Boy. It a boy.

Wan: Ok, he is a boy.

Bin: He drink, eh, eh...

Wan: What did he drink?

Bin: I don't know the word

Wan: Water? Coca?

Bin: Party, he drink.

Wan: Ok, is he drunk (he was acting again to pretend he was drunk)?

Bin: Right, right, Er Guo Tou (famous Chinese hard liquor brand, laughing).

Wan: He drank Baijiu (Chinese for hard liquor)?

Bin: A lot!

Wan: (checking his cell phone dictionary) Bai Jiu is hard liquor (showing the word to Bin).

Bin: (looking at it) Hard li...

Wan: Liquor.

Bin: Liquor, hard liquor. I like no hard liquor. Beer, I like beer.

Wan: You have a picture, a boy is drunk and he drank a lot of hard liquor.

Bin: Yes, for party. Birthday maybe.

With Wan's assistance, Bin not only guessed the picture, but also described his picture.

Pair three. In pair three, both students are from minorities and are from rural areas. Ai is from Group A; Ping is the last student from Group B. Ai had his turn first to describe (Picture 5).



Ai: This picture is ... (interrupted by Ping)

Ping: I can't do.

Ai: You can listen, I will talk. It's easy.

Ping: My listening...poor.

Ai: Let's have a try.

Ping: Sorry, sorry (lowering his head).

Ai: (just looking at me, disappointed)

Ping was very quiet and according to my observations, he was never active in class. Most of the time, he lowered his head and read his books. Ping is from an underdeveloped area of China. His written English was understandable and, in his journal writing, he told me oral English was too hard for him to learn and that he had no interest in speaking to westerners in the future. I talked with him a few times after class. His Mandarin was hard for me to understand, because his dialect was so different from standard Mandarin. He told me in his journal that he began to speak Mandarin when he entered university. The minority area where Ping was from was more remote and isolated. Ping told me that most of his life he had stayed in his hometown and so only spoke local dialect. For this activity, he was supposed to have pair work with Ai (the active student who played the boyfriend in the role play exercise mentioned earlier) from Group A. However, it was an unsuccessful activity. Ai ended having a conversation with me and Ping just sat there, quietly listening to us. Then, I asked Ping if he would have a try by describing his picture (Picture 6) to Ai and me, he again refused.



Picture 6

Through out phase two of the study, applying in-class activities helped me supervise students to speak English as much as possible. It made it more convenient for me to record and take notes of students' social interactions, which allowed me to better analyze their social interaction characteristics in an EFL environment and to assess their oral communicative competence development. Finally, more in-class activities also made it easier for me to compare rural, urban and minority students' responses to the collaborative, communication-oriented pedagogy used in their oral English learning, because I could observe them better in class.

Findings from Phase Two of the Study

Using Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development, I found that second language learners' social interaction was not simply for negotiation of meaning. Meaning negotiation only represents one of many ways that language development is facilitated through interaction. It also includes collaborative construction of an engagement in activities between novice and expert (Foster & Ohta, 2005; Martin-Beltrán, 2010; Ohta, 1995; Swain, 2000; Tocalli-Beller & Swain, 2007). Social interaction

process includes “negotiation of meaning and various kinds of peer assistance repairs” (Swain, 2000, p. 426). Therefore, I decided to look into students’ social interactions from two perspectives: a cognitive perspective of meaning negotiation and a sociocultural perspective of learners’ collaboration.

Cognitive perspective of students’ social interactions. Pica (1994) defined second language acquisition (SLA) meaning negotiation as “the modification and restructuring of interaction that occurs when learners and their interlocutors anticipate, perceive, or experience difficulties in message comprehensibility” (p. 494), so that “achieving comprehensibility of message meaning” (p. 495) is emphasized in meaning negotiation. For second language acquisition, clarification requests, confirmation and comprehension checks are considered meaning negotiation moves for reaching language comprehension (Long, 1980). When my students socially interacted in English, they constantly presented “clarification requests, confirmation checks and comprehension checks,” three ways of reaching message comprehension. In the process of students’ meaning negotiations, students were forced to produce more comprehensible output to answer clarification requests, confirmation and comprehension questions as well.

Clarification requests. First, students negotiated meaning through clarification requests. From their English conversation transcripts, I found that my students used three ways of requesting clarifications during peer social interactions, within the EFL environment: asking questions, remaining silent or giving negative feedback, and echoing.

- Asking direct questions. For example, in the theme of “seeing a doctor”, when Ai (boyfriend) was making an appointment with Huan (assistant), Ai didn’t understand Huan’s simple English expression “please come here.” He asked a

direct question as a clarification request “when and where”? to obtain more information so that he could know the location of the school clinic. Another example is from the theme of ordering in a restaurant when Ai (waiter) recommended a dish in Chinese. The customer students all understood, but they still asked “what is that”? to ask Ai to clarify the dish in English. In sample Group B, the first pair, Yu and Tao: when Yu was describing and Tao was guessing, Tao was confused about his comprehension of Yu’s message, such as why the girl was studying and covering her head, so he directly asked Yu to clarify or explain why the girl was covering her head.

- Remaining silent. Students with a beginning level English proficiency tended to use this way to request the need for clarification. In Group B, pair two, Bin’s general English proficiency was at the beginning level. When Wan was describing the picture, Bin requested clarifications of Wan’s speech, and he mainly used non-verbal response and negative response to ask for clarification instead of directly asking Wan questions. At the beginning of their conversation, Wan finished his first long sentence while using a lot of gestures to indicate in his picture that the boy had a lot of personal belongings. Bin just looked at his partner and me without saying anything. It seemed that he still could not understand Wan’s description. His non-verbal response pushed Wan to further clarify his expression. After Wan elaborated his explanation, Bin used a negative response, “I don’t know” to show that he still could not completely understand Wan’s message. In order to carry on the conversation, Wan had to keep on clarifying his utterance.

- Echoing. Students echoed the interlocutor's message as a means of indicating more clarification was necessary; such as in Group A, Huan (assistant) said "at the corner" to give directions to the school clinic and his speaking partner Ai responded "corner"? asking which corner Huan was talking about.

Confirmation checks. Second, students negotiated meaning through confirmation checks. My students presented two different ways of conducting confirmation checks.

- Repeating interlocutors' message with a rising tone. For the information gap activity, in pair one, at the beginning of their conversation, after Tao heard Yu's expression, "three girl are play mahjong," he immediately initiated a confirmation check by repeating Yu's sentence, "girls? Playing mahjong"? using a rising tone to check if his understanding was correct. In Group B, pair two, another example is that Bin had a tendency to speak short phrases to confirm his comprehension. At the ending of their conversation, he spoke with a rising tone: "Dirty? Not clean"? as a way to confirm if his understanding and conclusion about Wan's picture description was correct. In response, Wan immediately used a short phrase to confirm Bin's conclusion.
- Paraphrasing interlocutor's messages. In group A, for the "seeing the doctor" theme, Rui (doctor) didn't know how to say "prescription." At first, he asked a question of the whole group "how to say giving medicine"? Ke paraphrased "giving medicine" as "writing down a description of the medicine" to confirm Rui's expression intention. The other two students, Ai (boyfriend) and Hong, also used "description" and native Chinese "Kai Yaofang" to confirm Rui's expression intention. In the same group, for ordering in the restaurant theme, Huan (customer)

didn't know how to say recommend. Ke (waitress) paraphrased "help us order" as "suggest" to confirm Huan's intention.

Comprehension checks. Students negotiated meaning through comprehension checks. There were two methods students applied to conduct comprehension checks, asking questions and using body language.

- Asking direct questions. Students can directly ask "what do you think"? to check their partner's comprehension. For information gap activity, in pair one, Yu asked "what do you think? What kind of roommates are they"? to directly check whether Tao understood his description of the picture or not. When they switched turns to describe pictures, Tao asked Yu "do you understand my description"? to check Yu's comprehension.
- Using body language followed by a pause. Socially interacting with peers in an EFL environment, my Chinese students constantly applied body language, followed by looking at their partner and silently waiting for a response to check for interlocutor's comprehension. For example, in Group B, pair two, Wan used a lot of body language to aid his speaking and to assist with Bin's comprehension. After he finished his actions, he usually stopped and looked at Bin, waiting for a response from Bin to see if he had understood the message.

Producing comprehensible output. When I was reading through my transcriptions of student conversations, I collected the examples of students producing comprehensible output as observed in the transcripts. I found two common characteristics regarding my students' production of comprehensible output. First, speakers from both sides of a conversation had opportunities to produce comprehensible output. When one

speaker initiated a clarification request, a comprehension check, or a confirmation check to the other speaker, that speaker would usually elaborate, trying to assist the partner's understanding. Meanwhile, after a partner received more comprehensible input, they would also achieve a better understanding of the message, enabling them to produce more comprehensible output. I use pair one in Group B as an example to illustrate my statement. As a listener, Tao raised his questions along the way while he was paying close attention to Yu. His confirmation question, asking if the girls were playing mahjong, and his clarification question, asking why the girl was covering her head, forced Yu to modify and reorganize his output. These questions were asked so that Yu's speaking would become more comprehensible to him. Tao's requests pushed Yu to modify his utterances. Meanwhile, when Tao totally understood Yu's description, he also modified his conclusion from "loud, noisy" to a more complete and comprehensible output: "Roommates are noisy and not thoughtful." He adjusted his speaking form as he moved toward greater comprehension of his partner's message.

Second, students' comprehensible output developed from the semantic level to the syntactic level. Bin with a beginning speaking level, at the start of his conversation with Wan, was mostly quiet or simply said "I don't know." By the end of their conversation, he not only described his conclusion based on Wan's description and assistance, but also applied a new word "messy" and developed a new sentence: "My mom said I am messy."

Sociocultural perspective of students' social interactions. Studying sociocultural perspective of students' social interactions for oral English learning, I referenced Vygotsky's ZPD concept, which emphasizes collaborations between learners

and more competent individual's guidance for learner's development. I included two kinds of collaboration in class: students and students; students and EFL teacher.

Students-students collaboration and assistance. In my observations of students' collaborations and assistance, I referenced Foster and Ohta's (2005) four categories: co-construction, self-correction, other correction and encouragement. From my field note summaries, transcripts, students' journals and self-reports (Appendix B), I saw that my students clearly showed their ways of realizing collaborations and assistance in an EFL environment.

Co-construction. Learners' joint participation in forming utterances is considered to be co-construction (Foster & Ohta, 2005). My students' co-construction of their performances in an EFL environment reflected four features. First, students' co-construction of their utterances built upon their careful listening to interlocutor's speech. With varying speaking and listening proficiencies, students paid full attention to their speaking partners, so that they could participate by raising confirmation checks, comprehension checks and clarification requests during the conversation. For example, for Group A, in the seeing the doctor scenario, Hong with a beginning level of speaking chose to offer props or artifacts as a way to contribute to his group. He listened to his peers' conversation carefully and when group members tried to co-construct a new expression such as "prescription", he also stated his understating, though he used his native language. Through students' self-reports (Appendix B) and journal exchanges, learners reflected on the importance of listening. In self-report, Rui wrote that "I like listening to you [meaning me] speaking English; but working with my classmates, I think I have to listen carefully to continue the conversations" (May 17, 2012). Huan wrote in

his journal that in order to learn the most, “I have to be sincere and careful to listen to others’ words” (May 31, 2012).

Second, in the process of participating in a conversation, students’ co-constructions included their body language applications. On some occasions, aside from elaborating on message content, they would apply body language to help in completing a conversation. Their body language made the expression more easily understood, allowing other speakers to join in and interject their understandings and comments into the conversation. From Group B, Wan used his body language the most. In his journal, he wrote: “My dream was to be an actor before. I don’t feel shy about acting” (April 12, 2012). Ai, from Group A, also used body language to indicate a steam pot, because he didn’t know the English word for what he wanted to say. According to my field note summaries from week three until the end of the semester, on every Thursday afternoon for our class, the classroom atmosphere was always active and yet, somehow, relaxed and warm. Active because many students were talking at the same time; relaxed and warm because the students constantly used body language to aid their speaking and this acting attracted peers’ attention, often making them laugh as well.

Third, utterance co-construction could normally be realized by the assistance and leading of students with intermediate or advanced speaking levels in the learning process. More importantly, in some respects, is that students with a beginning level were willing to accept assistance so that collaboration may be realized. Take Wan and Bin (Group B, pair two) as an example; Wan led the whole conversation and, though facing Bin’s silences and insufficient responses, he was always patient and careful to elaborate while modifying his speech with body language, all so that Bin would be able to jointly

participate in their conversation. Wan assisted Bin's learning successfully, but only with Bin's willingness to collaborate. Without the willingness to collaborate, which was the case between the pair Ping and Ai, even though Ai was willing to help Ping, but Ping was not ready for the collaboration, there could be no co-construction of a conversation. Students continuously reflected the benefits of working with their classmates in their journals, especially in working with classmates with advanced speaking levels. Hong from Group A wrote in his journal, "I learned a lot from Rui. He is really good. He speaks with emotion. He helps me and his emotion influence me" (April 26, 2012). Bin wrote in Chinese in his journal (sometimes he tried to write in English) and I translated his sentences: "I had no interest to learn English in high school. I thought I was cool because I was not like anybody else around me. But I like your class, I like the activities. I began to speak English with my classmates' help. I think this is also cool" (April 19, 2012).

Fourth, students' co-constructions required that each group's planning and organization of the learning task be done in a systematic way. When I was observing Group A's work, I found that with speaking activities, they usually first brainstormed a basic outline of their activity and then divided the speaking activity into several smaller scenarios. Next, they arranged the order of performance for their scenarios before deciding on which student would perform which part in the role-play conversation. For instance, from my week-nine field notes, Group A students were practicing a conversation in which a customer asked for a refund from a department store (it is nearly impossible to get a store to refund your money in China). First, they discussed what sort of product might be refunded and decided that the refund experience should be a dramatic

one. Then they came up with three scenes in the following performance order: a girlfriend bought her boyfriend a pair of sun-glasses, but he did not like them; the boyfriend had to argue with customer service; the boyfriend had to meet with the store manager. Finally, Ke and Ai became boyfriend and girlfriend again. Huan and Hong worked at customer service. Ai argued with them first, and then he had to talk to the manager, Rui, to solve the dispute. The planning and organizing of their learning task was the first step of my students' co-construction of a complete conversation with the theme "getting a refund."

Self-correction. Through transcripts of student conversations and in-class observations, I found that my students used self-correction to assist each other in their learning process, and their self-corrections served two purposes: assisting interlocutors' comprehension and speaking and responding to interlocutor's help.

- Assisting interlocutor's comprehension and speaking. For example, in Group B, pair one, Yu self-corrected the phrase from "cover her head" to "cover her ears," because his original expression, "the girl covered her head," made Tao think the girl was sleeping. However, Yu intended to express that the girl was reviewing her homework. Yu's self-correction was correcting Tao's misunderstanding, helping him to reach an accurate comprehension. Speakers' self-corrections also assisted interlocutor's English speaking. In the same Group B, when Bin got his turn to describe a picture, he had very limited vocabulary. Wan self-corrected "Baijiu" to "hard liquor" with the help of a cell phone dictionary, so that he could help Bin to elaborate on his description with an accurate English word.

- Responding to the help. My students did not directly correct each other's errors. Instead, they spoke the correct way and provided a language model for their interlocutors to imitate. In fact, students did self-correct their own speaking errors as a response to their interlocutor's help. This phenomenon was easily spotted when looking at the first pair, Yu and Tao from Group B, who had similar English proficiency levels. They both had the capability to receive the indirect correction hint to do a self correction. For example, while Tao was still speaking, based on his description, Yu self-corrected his conclusion, "you mean roommates sleep and snoring," to the picture in describing roommates sleeping and snoring after Tao's indirect hint, "When they are sleeping, they are snoring."

Other-correction. Interestingly, I found none of my sample students did direct corrections of peers' errors. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory placed importance on "cultural variations" (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 197), which "examine the ways in which learning and teaching take place under different cultural circumstances" (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 197). Therefore, I examined my students' learning behavior in light of Chinese cultural circumstance. It's clear to me that my students' learning behavior was strongly influenced by Confucian philosophy (Flowerdew, 1998; Nelson, 1995; Oxford, 1995). Flowerdew (1998) argued that Confucian tenets assume that "society is hierarchically ordered; with due respect shown for age, seniority and rank" (p. 325). The relationship between peers and especially superiors "must always be accorded face and not give cause to lose it through overt or public criticism" (p. 325). Nelson (1995) analyzed Chinese students' learning style as influenced by traditional Confucianism and wrote that "within the Confucian tradition, students learn through co-

operation, by working for the common good, by supporting each other and by not elevating themselves above others” (p. 9). Therefore, I state that my students’ not directly correcting peer’s errors was due to the purpose of saving their peers’ face and to not overly showing themselves to be better than others.

Encouragement. My students applied different means of encouragement to each other. I have mentioned that paying full attention to the peers’ speaking was one way for students’ to implement their co-construction of social interactions. It can also be considered as a way for students to show encouragement of each others’ speaking efforts. According to my teaching experience, students usually have no interest in listening to their peers (except for classmates with advanced speaking levels). Through communicative activities, more students developed the habit of listening to peers and showing respect and encouragement. Yu from Group B wrote in his journal that “we speak with different pronunciations, not like yours. I have learned in your class that I need show great respect to others when they are speaking and whether he or she is good at or just doesn’t like to speak, I should listen carefully and catch what they want to express” (May 10, 2012). Ping from Group B, who did not have a successful conversation with his partner, wrote in his journal, “I don’t like speaking. I like listening. I listen to my classmates. I understood what they mean. It’s interesting” (May 24, 2012). Maybe, to Ping, listening to peers was his way to show support and contribute to group work.

Students with an intermediate or advanced English speaking level showing willingness to help peers was another important means to show encouragement. Wong Fillmore (1991) suggested a second language learning model within a social context,

including target language (TL) speaker's help, as one of three components of the learning model. She argued that the TL speaker's willingness, responsibility and extent of involvement will lead to better results due to higher quality of support for the second language learners. In an EFL environment, where target speakers are few (usually none), some of my students with intermediate or advanced speaking levels could help with beginning level students' speaking, substituting for target speaker's help for second language learners. In fact, in Group A, Rui helped Hong and Huan constantly. Through my field notes, I consistently found that Hong and Huan depended on Rui very much and if they met difficulties, they first would look to Rui for help. In Group B, I have explained, in detail, how Wan tried his best to help Bin's understanding and speaking.

Not directly correcting interlocutors' speaking errors was due to the influence of my students' Chinese culture. It worked positively for them to show encouragement for each other, because, not directly correcting peers' errors encouraged speakers to continue to speak English without feeling frustrated. "When students were talking, I heard grammar errors constantly, but nobody was correcting others. Sometimes they would self-correct their own errors, such as he and she gender conversions, group members kindly laughed, but without correcting another student. Nobody correcting errors made their conversations flow better. They actively invented different ways in which to express themselves; "I saw very little frustration" (field notes, May 17, 2012). Finally, students showed their direct encouragement by patting peers on the arm or shoulder, or by complimenting a peer's work: "Good Job"!

Students-EFL teacher collaboration and assistance. Through phase one of the study, I realized students' oral English social interactions in an EFL environment

incorporate the EFL teacher's assistance and collaborations. For phase two of the study, I continued my collaboration with my students. The collaboration between my students and me, during their oral English learning process, was primarily through my assistance of the students' independent learning effort. Looking into my assistance role, I referenced Tharp and Gallimore's seven categories of teaching. Through my own summaries of field notes and students' journals and self-reports (Appendix B), I found my assistance role for my students' oral English learning in an EFL environment was mainly reflected through the following three categories.

Explaining. Explaining meant "providing explanatory and belief structure" that "assists learner in organizing and justifying new learning and perceptions" (Tharp & Gallimore, 1991, p. 4). I realized that for learning oral English, in an EFL environment, students' second language cultural knowledge was crucial. Through phase one of the study, I realized that students attached strong Chinese cultural values to their social interactions in English. For example, for their last drama activity, students were encouraged to create their own stories. All their stories happened in imagined Chinese contexts: five of them directly related to students' college lives; one was related to a current Chinese social problem; the other was an ancient Chinese fairytale. I purposely added lectures to the class curriculum regarding second language cultural knowledge. My lectures facilitated students' social interactions, especially when they were practicing target language life style activities. In week nine, "before students were asked to have a conversation asking for refund at a department store, I heard them say 'really? Impossible!' In China, rarely can we get a refund or even store credit after we have bought something. When they heard that in America, you could even get a refund for a

computer purchase, they were all surprised. Then immediately, they asked me how to do it. I explained the role of the receipt, customer service, return period and that certain items cannot usually be returned, such as medicine. After my explanations, while admiring such nice shopping/customer treatment by American stores, students started their own conversations. Group A decided to return a pair of sun-glasses” (field notes, May 10, 2012).

Sometimes, an EFL teacher needs to clarify students’ misunderstandings of English language sociocultural rules. For example, one of my students practiced a conversation in an imagined American college classroom. When a student playing an American teacher asked him what his life’s dream was, the student answered in a very rude manner, “none of your business”! His explanation was that America culture protects privacy and advocates freedom and equal rights, so students did not have to treat teachers as a superior power and answer their questions. Apparently, the student misunderstood “freedom” and thought rudeness was a way to show his freedom. At this point, I had to explain and clarify their misunderstanding.

My lectures on English speaking cultures aroused students’ learning interest. Ping was the quietest boy in my sample groups. In his journal he wrote to me, “I am interested to how American people live. You can tell us more stories about your studying in America. Even you speak your story in English, I can understand it. I like it” (April 19, 2012). According to my field notes for week 13 (June 7, 2012), after I introduced some ways for Americans to have vacations, such as camping, hiking, perhaps driving an RV (recreational vehicle) for sightseeing, I saw Huan happily patted Rui’s shoulder and said,

“I make money, invite your family to travel with me in my RV.” Rui immediately shook hands with him and said: “Deal”! I was impressed by their joke after my lecture.

In addition to lecturing on cultural knowledge, I also encouraged them to discover new information on their own such as I did in phase one of the study. Most of the time, I did not interfere with students’ social interactions. My explanation was based on their attempts and understanding; therefore, it was easier for them to comprehend and remember better, such as when I explained “prescription” after students came up with “description or writing down medicine.”

Directing. My directing role of “requesting specific action” (Tharp & Gallimore, 1991, p. 4) was aimed at helping students gain knowledge of English speaking cultures. Through students’ self-reports (Appendix B), I found that the most frequent request for help was for teachers’ recommendations for learning resources. I recommended English language movies, specific TV series and magazines for students to study and enjoy, hoping that they would build more knowledge of English speaking cultures. I also directed students to prepare PowerPoint presentations on a comparison of the cultural differences between China and other countries, such as the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, and so on. Through my students’ self-reports (Appendix B), they showed me that they valued such comparison exercises. Tao wrote in his journal on what he had learned: “Knowing cultural differences is very useful. We like asking people how much they make every month, but in America, it is private. If I ask an American how much he make, it is not polite” (April 5, 2012).

Providing feedback. Providing feedback refers to giving students meaningful information on their performances (Tharp & Gallimore, 1991). The same as I did in phase

one of the study, when I noticed students making grammatical errors in their speaking, I did not stop them on the spot; in these situations students often self-corrected their errors when they repeated their expressions. After they finished their speaking, I always gave them positive comments and compliments as an EFL teacher's encouragement.

Journal exchanges with my students solved my problem of providing feedback to so many students, given the limited class time. In phase one; my feedback was mainly positive encouragement. While in phase two of my study, my feedback did not consist of just giving students praise, I also pointed out ways in which they could improve their skills. Writing in their journals saved class time and also avoided pointing out problems in front of their peers. Students really valued my "critical" feedback and always expected more feedback during class time, because it helped them to improve their practice further. Ke wrote in her journal that "every time I finished a speaking task, I hope you can give me grade (evaluation). I never know I speak very fast and not clear. You told me and I changed it, my classmates praised me. They ask me to participate in an English speaking contest. I am making progress" (June 7, 2012). Rui wrote: "If time allows, I really wish you could give us more feedback after each group's presentation, so we can know other group's positive and problems as well" (June 7, 2012). Besides analyzing students' social interaction characteristics, I also assessed their communicative competence development in phase two of the study.

Students' communicative competence development. In assessing students' communicative competence development, I included both students and my perspectives in the process. For my perspective, I generally referenced Canale and Swain's (1980) discussion of the three components of communicative competence—grammatical,

sociolinguistic and strategic—as three categories for assessing students’ oral communicative competence development. Looking at students’ perspectives, I examined their understanding of the concept of oral communicative competence (Appendix E), because in my opinion, students’ development of their understanding of the concept of oral communicative competence was also a sign indicating their communicative competence development.

Grammatical competence development. Grammatical competence includes “the knowledge of lexical items and the rules of morphology, syntax, sentences-grammar semantics and phonology” (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 29). Going over my transcripts, I found there are three features that indicate my students’ grammatical competence development.

- Students showed development of grammatical competence by developing their utterances from the semantic level to the syntactic level. Such an example was when Ai introduced a fish dish, first using his native language, and later developing a group of English sentences to describe how to make the fish dish.
- Students developed their English lexis by acquiring the use of new vocabulary such as “prescription”, “closet”, “messy”, “hard liquor”, “sandwich” and “steamed fish.”
- Students also reinforced their learned English grammar through their social interactions. Through self-correction, students corrected grammar errors such as gender misuse of “he” versus “she” and verb collocation errors, correcting “like clean” to “like cleaning.” Through their self-corrections, they reinforced grammar usage.

Sociolinguistic competence development. Canale and Swain (1980) argue that sociolinguistic competence is made up of “two sets of rules: sociocultural rules of use and rules of discourse” (p. 30). From their argument, I found features that could indicate my students’ sociocultural competence development.

Sociocultural rules. Sociocultural rules refer to what extent someone speaks appropriately within a given sociocultural context (Canale & Swain, 1980). First, I have found that students developed English expressions that were appropriate for English language sociocultural (North American) speaking norms. In the process of students’ collaboration, they showed encouragement for each other’s learning. Complementing a partner’s “job” was one form of encouragement. I observed that when students complemented their partners, their speech was appropriate in reference to the English sociocultural speaking norms of North America. When they were praised by their classmates, they naturally answered “Thank you!” as acknowledgment; in China, people will usually express modesty, instead, by saying that they have not done a good enough job, when they are praised by others. When a student was asking for clarification or confirmation, they used phrases such as: “I beg your pardon”? or “Are you kidding”? instead of a phrase literally translated from Chinese such as: “Repeat what you have just said” and “Are you making up a joke”? Students reflected the benefits of learning such basic English phrases. Wan wrote in his journal, “I found some English phrases are really useful. When others praise me, I always feel a little bit shy and didn’t know how to answer. Now I just say thank you! It’s so easy” (March 22, 2012). Ai wrote, “When I answered my friends’ calls, I say how are you? It’s funny. But if they speak more, I had no time to react again. I need more practice” (June 7, 2012). Additionally, I saw students

apply basic phrases in their daily lives. During class breaks, I constantly heard them say such phrases as: “Are you kidding me”? “Good for you”! “Just so-so”! “Mind your own business”! “Come on”! etc. At the end of classes, when I finished teaching, they usually used English phrases such as: “See you next time”! or “Have a pleasant trip”! The last phrase was because my students knew I had to take a one hour bus trip to return home, it was appropriately used.

Second, students developed speech styles that are appropriate to certain English speaking cultures. In Group A, the student who played the “assistant” was answering a patient’s call, and he introduced their clinic at the beginning of the call by saying “Hello, Dragon Clinic.” In China, people seldom mention names initially on the phone. In a different role play theme, ordering in a restaurant, Ai (waiter) said to the customers “You have a good night”. Usually, a normal Chinese restaurant waiter or waitress wouldn’t say anything like this.

Rules of discourse. Rules of discourse include speech cohesion and coherence. Speech cohesion is related to the language user’s application of appropriate grammatical forms to make the discourse cohesive (Canale & Swain, 1980). My findings showed that most of the time, students only spoke short independent sentences and seldom used grammatical forms. It reflected their speaking level at that stage of development. The only case in which I observed students applying grammatical forms to their speaking was that of Yu and Tao (Group B, pair one). At the end of their conversation, both of them used the grammatical connection “so” to either summarize description or draw a conclusion. Texting coherence is the connecting of simple sentences into whole, more meaningful ones (Savignon, 1983). So far as students’ utterance coherence was

concerned, their utterances were complete and meaningful, because our speaking activities all had clear goals or themes, such as practicing a conversation in a western clinic, restaurant, or guessing the picture content. Students developed complete conversations to realize their speaking goals and themes.

Strategic competence development. Canale and Swain (1980) define strategic competence as “verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence” (p. 30). I used Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell’s (1995) five parts of strategic competence to assess my student’s strategy applications in their conversations.

Avoidance or reduction strategies. Avoidance strategies refer to strategies that may replace messages and avoid topics (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1995). One example I found of this kind of strategy was when Bin, from Group B, had his turn at describing a picture. Because he had limited vocabulary, he did not know how to give a description of a boy who was drinking liquor, so he avoided focusing on a description of what the boy was drinking; instead he offered a new clue: “He is having a party.” Taking a student from Group A, as another example, Rui (doctor) didn’t know how to say “prescription” to his patient, Ke. Rui applied “avoidance or reduction strategy” and passed a piece of paper (artifact) to Ke saying: “This is your medicine” and so avoided saying “This is your prescription.” He applied avoidance strategy by resorting to an artifact. Through students’ self-reports (Appendix B) from week four, eight, ten and fourteen , I discovered that students had mentioned that “pointing at stuff” was useful as a

means of getting across intended meaning when they could not express their thought in English.

Achievement or compensatory strategies. Achievement or compensatory strategies, include “circumlocution, approximation (using a general word to replace a specific word, such as a ship for fishing boat), all purpose words (things, people), non-linguistic means (gestures, pictures), reconstructing, word-coinage, literal translation, foreignizing, code switching and retrieval (bro, bron, bronze)” (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1995, p. 28). For example, Ai, Hong and Bin all used Chinese native language, “Qingzheng Luyu, Kai Yaofang, and Baijiu”, to replace English vocabulary “steamed fish, prescription and hard liquor.” They also constantly depended on body language or gestures to convey meaning. Students reflected that it was useful to use native language or body language to help with speaking difficulties, but they showed concern for the overuse of such strategy. Ai wrote in his journal that: “Sometimes, we have to use Chinese to replace the English words that we don’t know, but I don’t like depending on it. I want to develop more English vocabulary. I hope you can teach us after we performed” (May 24, 2012).

Stalling strategies. Such strategies refer to “fillers, hesitation devices” (p. 27) and repetition (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1995). Students had a tendency to repeat certain phrases to gain more time for their speaking. In one example, Ai (waiter) was answering his customers’ requests to explain about a dish in English, he repeatedly said, “er, er. Let me think, how to say it”? Such was also the case in Group B, pair one (Yu and Tao), after Tao heard Yu’s complete description, Tao said “ok, ok. I see, I see” before he expressed his conclusion based on his understanding.

In fact, whenever I was observing students' social interactions I saw the near constant application of stalling strategies. Most of the time, if they met speaking difficulties, they looked to me first, expecting help (though I seldom entered their interaction until they had tried everything they could as a group), but then they would look to their group members for help. By looking at others and remaining silent for a while, they gained more time to come up with the language they needed to express their thought.

Self-monitoring strategies. Such strategies refer to correcting or changing one's own speech (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1995). This strategy and my analysis of students' self-correction had a lot in common. Students often showed examples of self-correcting misused vocabulary in favor of something more accurate such as: "closet" to replace "big box". They also self-corrected many grammar errors, such as "sleep and snoring" to "sleeping and snoring" and changing "like sleep" to "like sleeping."

Interactional strategies. Such strategies highlight the cooperative strategies between speakers. Interactional strategies include "appeals for help" (p. 28), meaning negotiation and "response and comprehension checks" (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1995, p. 28). This definition of interactional strategies and my explanation of students' meaning negotiation and collaboration in their social interactions have a lot in common. I have discussed, from a cognitive perspective, that meaning negotiation involves students' confirmation checks, clarification requests and comprehension checks. Meanwhile, through meaning negotiation, the students produced comprehensible output to confirm, clarify, and answer their partners' questions. From a sociocultural perspective, students collaboratively and actively engaged in the learning process and assisted each

other in co-constructing conversations. They used self-correction to assist their speaking partner's comprehension and for the production of accurate oral English. They paid full attention to their peers and gave respect and encouragement to their learning partners. They also collaborated with me in their learning process, asking for English learning resources and carefully listening to my guidance. Thus, through their social interactions, students constantly applied interactional strategies and, as a result, contributed to their strategic competence development.

Students' development of the understanding of communicative competence.

In my opinion, students' understanding of oral communicative competence was an additional sign indicating their communicative competence development. Through the distribution of a questionnaire (Appendix E), in week five and again in week 15 (The first time, 37 students turned in reflections; the second time, all 39 students did), I analyzed class reflections while paying special attention to my ten sample students' understandings. There were two main questions for this questionnaire: What is oral communicative competence? What can you do to improve communicative competence? After analyzing students' questionnaire reflections by categorizing their similar reflections in three categories, as Canale and Swain (1980) suggested: grammar, sociocultural and strategy, I found that their understandings were in agreement with the basics of Canale and Swain's communicative competence framework: grammar, speaking strategies and sociocultural rules. As for understanding the discourse rules, students' data did not reflect their knowledge of discourse rules. More importantly though is that they did include competence of understanding others as another indicator for oral communicative

competence. Finally, they engendered more ways for oral communicative competence development.

Competence of grammatical rules, speaking strategies and sociocultural rules. In the first questionnaire on April 12, 2012, seven of my sample students mentioned the importance of English grammar. Bin wrote in Chinese that “it is helpful if I know more English words.” Ping reflected that “grammar is very important, without words and grammar, making sentence is hard.” Hong wrote that “I hope teacher sometimes review grammar. I forgot it.” They also indicated the importance of speaking strategies. Ai reflected that “[competent speakers] know to ignore some details and get the main idea; even if we speak Chinese, it was easy to pass details. Using body language, just as pointing at stuff, make speaking English easy.” Yu wrote that “[competent speakers] are able to listen and use mouth, eyes, hands and body to know and express some messages.” In the second questionnaire (June 21, 2012), besides continuously indicating the importance of grammar and speaking strategies, students reflected their understanding of the sociocultural rules of English speaking by stating that oral communicative competence enabled speakers to talk appropriately in various contexts and to respond to other interlocutors in an appropriate way. Huan wrote that “[competent speakers] could respond others in an appropriate way.” Ke wrote that “[competent speakers] could speak different word to different person.” In addition, students thought that oral communicative competence should include the competence to speak English with emotional content, just as any native English speaker could. Wan reflected that “people with communicative competence speak with natural emotion, like speaking in their mother language.” Rui wrote: “It is important to know how to deal with foreigners avoiding using some words

that can be offensive or cause misunderstanding.” Hong wrote, “I can’t really imagine I am in a foreign country. I hope to listen to more stories in America.” Ping wrote, “understanding culture is interesting. Teacher can play movies to us.”

Competence of understanding input. My students had raised their own understanding of oral communicative competence in an EFL environment. Besides grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competence, my students reflected in both questionnaires that oral communicative competence should also include speaker’s competence for understanding English. Yu wrote that “[communicative competence] it is an ability of listening and speaking; you have to listen carefully to continue the conversations” (April 12, 2012). Rui wrote that “as I have learned so more from the English class, I gradually realize oral communicative competence refer to speakers’ competence to understand others’ opinions, and feelings” (June 21, 2012). Such reflections included speakers’ competence to receive input, as well. Their reflections reflected the characteristics of oral speech: which involved speakers’ immediate expression and interlocutors responding differently based on each other’s input (Vygotsky, 1987). Unlike social interactions with native speakers (NS), where there is an obvious expert, non-native speakers’ interactions could involve different accents and pronunciations, so that a non-native speaker needed more patience and competence to receive a NNS interlocutors’ input and then respond to them appropriately. In their opinion, listening and observing carefully is crucial for understanding an interlocutor’s message. Through our practitioner action research, my students concluded that “competence of understanding interlocutor’s message” is another component to oral communicative competence.

Ways of improving communicative competence. The second question of the questionnaire asked students' suggestions for ways to improve oral communicative competence. In the first questionnaire, the most frequently mentioned way that students said would help them improve their oral communicative competence was by peers'/teachers' assistance. Twenty-three students reflected teachers'/peers' assistance was important for oral communicative competence development. Additionally, 21 students reflected that teacher recommended learning resources and working with peers on diverse projects were important for competence development.

In the second questionnaire, besides continuously indicating practice and peers/teachers' assistance as being important for oral communicative competence development, students reflected that practicing was also important for improving communicative competence. They suggested that our practice should involve both in-class time and after-class time. Further, they suggested that class activities should cover as many English-speaking contexts as possible, making learning more natural. They also mentioned the need for more after-class activities, because they would have more opportunities to learn from peers. They felt that the speaking opportunities in class were too limited to provide enough practice. Hong wrote, "I am slow, I need more time after class. Rui can help me" (June 21, 2012). A few students mentioned that the group work should be more competitive so that they would be more motivated. Wan wrote, "I like competition. Every time, there is a match, I felt time flies." Ke reflected "Group competition made my group work harder. We all want to win" (June 21, 2012).

How students develop oral communicative competence in an EFL environment. Through my data analysis, I found that my students did develop oral

communicative competence after a commutative approach was applied for their oral English learning. In the following section, I will first discuss how students develop oral communicative competence in an EFL environment with reference to three components of the communicative competence framework.

Grammatical development through meaning negotiation, collaboration, and assistance. I have mentioned that one of the features which indicated my students' grammatical competence development was that they developed their English speaking from the semantic level to the syntactic level. I will use an example to explain their development as realized through students' meaning negotiations and collaborations. In Group A, when Huan (assistant) socially interacted with Ai (boyfriend), his first few utterances were mainly at the semantic level, using phrases such as: "Three this afternoon, at the corner" to describe the location of the clinic. Huan's information was not clear to Ai; as a result, Ai requested the clarification of where exactly the clinic was, which pushed Huan to develop a more comprehensible output. Huan felt it difficult to elaborate, but his peers encouraged him by patiently waiting for his response; Rui patted his shoulder as an encouragement. During the process of his elaboration, Ke co-constructed sentences with Huan using the verbal clue, "building 4." By the end of the conversation, Huan had developed his utterance to a syntactic level: "If you pass building-4, left, your left, a building is at the corner. That's us. You can see us." We can see that Huan's grammatical competence development was facilitated through his meaning negotiation with Ai, his co-construction of sentences with Ke and the encouragement he received from his group members.

Another feature that indicated the students' grammatical development was that they developed more English vocabulary. Bin, from Group B, began the course with a beginning level of oral English. Through social interactions with his peers, he was also able to develop and use much new vocabulary. When Bin had his turn to describe a picture, he was hesitant; he started with a really simple sentence: "It a boy." Wan did not correct him on the spot, so as not to frustrate Bin; instead, Wan spoke a correct sentence, "he is a boy," to carry on the conversation. During the process of Bin's description, Wan asked a clarification question about what the boy was drinking; he also asked two confirmation questions: "Is he drunk"? and "He drank Baijiu"? Bin confirmed both of Wan's questions. Wan realized Baijiu was a Chinese word and should be changed, so he looked it up and found the term "hard liquor" which he showed to Bin, then taught him how to pronounce it. Wan also learned new vocabulary by trying to help Bin. Bin finally applied "hard liquor" in a complete sentence with some grammatical error, "I like no hard liquor, I like beer." His application of "hard liquor" was a sign of his vocabulary development. This vocabulary development was realized through his meaning negotiation moves with Wan and with Wan's assistance and co-construction of the new word. Because of these observations, I argue that students' social interactions facilitate their grammatical development through their meaning negotiations, collaborations and assistance provided by peers.

Sociolinguistic development through meaning negotiation, collaboration and assistance. Students' development of the sociocultural rules of their second language was indicated by their knowledge of certain English speaking styles and appropriate usage of English slang and phrases. EFL teachers played an important role in assisting

such development. For example, students had no experience of getting a refund, making an appointment before seeing a doctor or tipping at the end of a meal. The lectures I gave with the help of the textbooks, and my own stories of living in America, provided a vivid context for the students to understand how such English conversations should happen. As a result, they had a clearer idea of how to start imagining themselves in an English-speaking context and to begin their English conversations. Besides my own teaching, I sometimes invited native English speakers to my classes. I invited a British teacher as a guest speaker to introduce some knowledge of British culture. And I organized a Skype conversation, inviting an American friend to talk to my students online, answering whatever questions they wanted to ask. When the British teacher talked to one of my students, the student said, “You look so young”! The teacher immediately answered, “Thank you”! Although his “immodest” attitude toward receiving compliments made all my students laugh, my students learned an appropriate norm for responding to a compliment within an English language cultural context. In addition to the EFL teacher’s assistance role of introducing and clarifying English sociocultural rules, the students needed opportunities to apply those rules. Through their social interactions and collaborations, they were able to fully understand some of the sociocultural rules and put them to use. By observing peers’ presentations, students could also learn some useful phrases in contexts. Therefore, students’ development of sociocultural rules was facilitated through EFL teacher’s assistance and peers’ collaborations.

In so far as the “rules of discourse” are concerned, I have stated that most of my students’ speech cohesion development was not obvious, because they had a tendency to use short independent sentences. I have observed that the only pair of students who

developed their speech cohesion was Yu and Tao (Group B, pair one). They had similar English language proficiencies. During one of their social interactions, Yu clarified Tao's misunderstanding (the girl was not sleeping, but studying), self-corrected speaking errors with Tao's indirect assistance, and finally, accurately described the picture by using logical grammatical forms in his speaking. Yu said, "This girl didn't want to hear, so she is covering her ears" to indicate the girl was covering her ears because it was noisy and she needed to study. Based on Yu's description, Tao wrapped up his conclusion with "So, roommates are noisy and not thoughtful." The conversation between Yu and Tao was logical and cohesive; importantly, their speech cohesion was realized through their meaning negotiations and collaborations. Communicative activities with clear themes or goals could facilitate students' speech coherence development.

I have discussed that social interaction facilitated students' sociolinguistic development through students' meaning negotiation, collaboration and assistance from the EFL teacher. However, as a second language learner myself, I must point out that sociocultural competence development will never be easy for L2 learners. There are always many new challenges awaiting us.

Strategic development through meaning negotiation, collaboration and assistance. Referencing the five components of speaking strategies, as defined by Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1995), my findings indicate that students applied diverse strategies in negotiating meaning and solved communication breakdowns. When my students' conversations were interrupted by new English vocabulary, they tended to use both avoidance and achievement strategies. When students needed to gain time so that they could answer the interlocutor's clarification requests and confirmation checks, they

had a tendency to apply “stalling strategies”, which gave them the time needed to clarify or confirm their previous utterances. Using this strategy, students also gained an opportunity to self-monitor their previous utterance and then responded with corrections. By definition, interactional strategies already include students’ meaning negotiation moves. Meanwhile, students’ efforts toward solving communication breakdowns also improved their ability to collaborate, which assisted them in the group learning process. For example, students used “achievement strategy” to paraphrase English words for the purpose of co-constructing an English utterance with peers. Self-monitoring is a form of peer assistance and collaboration (Foster & Ohta, 2005); interactional strategies emphasize cooperative strategies between speakers. My students’ strategies development was facilitated through their meaning negotiations, collaborative work and mutual assistance.

Relative to the three competences, as defined by Canale and Swain (1980), I summarize my discussion and state that social interaction facilitates students’ oral communicative competence development through peer’s meaning negotiation, collaboration, and assistance as provided by the EFL teacher and or other learners.

Students’ responses to a communicative approach oral English class.

Investigating how rural, urban and minority students responded to a communicative approach was my final research concern. I have analyzed how my sample students (except one student, Ping) achieved greater oral communicative competence through social interaction. Wong Fillmore (1983) once pointed out that in order to facilitate learners’ second language learning, EFL teachers should study learners’ variations and characteristics in a sizeable class. Mahn and John-Steiner (2002) also suggest that

teachers should try to understand students' "lived experiences, knowledge and feelings" (p. 53) so that they are better able to understand students' "cognitive and emotional development" (p. 49) and are better able to collaborate with their learning development. Because I faced 39 students in my class, I found it was challenging for me to learn something of each individual's life experience, so I only focused on ten students in phase two of the study. With the inclusion of students' perspectives and through my observations, I was able to analyze and compare urban and rural student's oral English learning in class. I paid special attention to minority students, mainly through my journal exchanges with them.

Learning engagement. According to my weekly field note summaries, rural and urban students from my sample groups, both actively engaged in their oral English learning process. Two urban students, Rui and Ke, enthusiastically organized and led group work. They also constantly assisted their peers in their group work. In this group, both urban students played leading roles by taking the most challenging speaking roles, by organizing activities, and by verbally and non-verbally encouraging peers. The third urban student—Bin, with a beginning level of English—still tried to follow along with his speaking partner's help and seemed determined to keep on trying in the future.

The other seven students, all from rural areas and with varying English proficiencies, actively engaged in class activities in their own ways. In Group A, Ai (who played the boyfriend) was very dynamic in acting and speaking for their group. My weekly field note summaries showed that Ai always suggested adding acting to their group conversations. His engagement made Group A's atmosphere very active. Huan (who played the assistant) was not confident at the beginning, but tried to complete a

conversation with his group member's help. He was always sitting next to Rui and often asked for Rui's help. Hong (who didn't speak any English and had no role in the activity ("seeing the doctor") was shy in class at the beginning of the semester; however, he gradually interacted with group members in English in the later activities. From his self-report (Appendix B), Hong saw his own progress when he was summarizing what he had done for class activities. In week four, he wrote, "I talked to Rui in English. Most time, I just listened to classmates. I can understand them" (April 5, 2012). In week ten, he wrote, "I played a customer to order food. I am not nervous in front of classmates. I stand next to Rui and Huan. I asked the waiter questions. We practiced and it is not difficult" (May 17, 2012). In week 14, he wrote, "I had a talk (English conversation) with Rui. He is clear, I understand him. I speak him, he also understand me. It's great" (June 14, 2012).

In Group B, pair one, Yu and Tao evenly distributed their conversation between themselves. Both of them showed consistency in their active engagement in class activities. When they were doing pair work, they tried different ways to negotiate meaning and to collaboratively assist each other so that they could complete the task successfully. Wan mostly worked with Bin, trying his best to help Bin understand his expressions and provide accurate English phrases and sentences to help Bin learn. Meanwhile, Wan also improved his own speaking by his effort to help Bin. Rogoff (1990) writes, "working with a partner equal in skill, or even one less advanced may still yield progress" (p. 173). In his journal, Wan wrote, "I really have to try my best to speak to let Bin understand me. I also learned new words. I speak short sentences instead of longer one. I found short sentences are easy and useful" (June 7, 2012). Ping as the quietest boy in the group, mainly engaged in group activities by listening. Rogoff (1995) argues that

learners actively observe and follow others' decisions is also participating, whether or not they contributed directly to the decisions. Apparently, Ping participated in his group work by careful observing and listening.

Learning expectations. After I reviewed my sample students' self-reports (Appendix B), I found they had different expectations for our oral English class at different stages of phase two of the study. For instance, at the beginning of our semester, most expectations were related to speaking opportunities. From Group A, Huan reflected in journal: "I don't feel comfortable to use body language. I need more practice with my classmates" (April 5, 2012). Ai wrote, "I speak too fast. Every time if I'm excited, I speak very fast, my classmates all know that and laugh at me. But this is my habit. I need to slow down and speak clearly through more practice" (April, 5, 2012). From Group B, Tao wrote "I need more practice. Listening to the classmates was more interesting than listening to tapes; listening to the tape made me sleepy. Speaking practice my listening as well" (April 19, 2012). At the end of semester, I found students' expectations were related to three perspectives:

1. Speaking opportunities. Bin had a beginning level of English proficiency and only expected to be able to participate with classmates with intermediate or advanced levels in future conversations. Bin wrote in Chinese: "Both my teacher and Wan helped me; I found speaking could be fun." Then he wrote in English: "More speaking" (May 31, 2012).
2. EFL teacher's feedback or guidance. Most of my sample students expected that I could help them to learn better. Yu wrote, "I want to improve my pronunciations. Maybe we could watch more native speaker's speaking. I know making meaning

is basic requirement. I want to speak beautiful English” (June 14, 2012). Huan wrote, “I need spend more time on English. Can you give me some advice, like websites, textbook” (June, 14, 2012). Hong wrote “I hope you tell me more about my problems, so I can overcome it” (June 14, 2012). Ping wrote, “understanding others is important. You should tell us more stories in America” (May 31, 2012).

3. Creativity of class activities. Rui and Ke expected that English communication should be more creative and variable. It seemed that they were confident enough to expect more challenging speaking tasks. Although students reflected many different learning expectations at different stages of phase two of the study, in general, they expressed the desire to have more communicative activities for their oral English learning. Their expectations indicated their acknowledgement and fondness for communicative activities in class.

In a traditional Chinese foreign language classroom, students must usually apply rote learning methods as a learning strategy (Rao, 1996, 2002). However, from my studies, I found that communicative activities allowed students to socially interact with each other, which then allowed most of my students to behave as active and motivated learners. Masgoret and Gardner (2003) discussed characteristics of motivated learners:

The motivated individual expends effort, is persistent and attentive to the task at hand, has goals, desires, and aspiration, enjoys the activity, experiences reinforcement from success and disappointment from failure, makes attributions concerning success and or failure, is aroused, and makes use of strategies to aid in achieving goals. (p. 128)

My students' active learning engagement, their meaning negotiation and collaboration between peers, reflected their desire, effort and attribution to realize their learning goals, even though they played different roles in different activities. Students indicated their enjoyment of class activities through their learning expectations. Therefore, according to my research, the communicative activities that allowed students to socially interact in English enabled most students to become motivated learners, regardless of their rural or urban upbringing.

Minority students. Minorities make up roughly 8 percent of the Chinese population (Gil, 2006; Kormondy, 2012; Lin, 1997). During my ten-year university teaching experience, I taught mainly majority students. My new experience with minority students made me take a closer look at their backgrounds and analyze any special needs they might require for their learning. There were four minority students in my sample; Ai, Hong, Tao and Ping. Ai, Hong and Tao were from the same rural area in central China, next to the Three Gorges in Hubei province.

In Group A, Ai played the boyfriend. Through the two semesters, he was one of the most active boys in my class. Every time he talked to me, he always spoke in English and never cared about peers' observations. Through his journal, he told me that he was more interested in English learning than he was in his major, mechanical engineering. In his self-evaluation, he claimed to be outgoing and that it was more suitable for him to hang out with people rather than machines. He also told me that he had seen many western tourists visiting the Three Gorges each year, so he has become interested in becoming an English tourist guide and hoped he would be able to introduce his hometown to them.

The other minority student in Group A, Hong, had no speaking part and only provided artifacts for the “seeing the doctor” activity. He was also from the Three Gorges area, but he lived in a village farther out on a mountain; he was shy. Before he came to university, he seldom had a chance to contact people outside of his village. Studying in an urban university was a bit of a culture shock for him. Fortunately, in Hong’s group, Rui (who played the doctor) had been helping him along the way. Hong made progress in speaking, but his speaking level was still at a beginning level for his group. Coming from a remote and undeveloped mountain area, Hong afforded college by taking a student loan. He hoped to graduate soon, so that he could make money to help his family have a better life. Speaking English, for him, was only a course in college—a course he had to pass to graduate. Through the journal, he told me he would be happy to settle into a state-owned enterprise (because of the Iron Rice Bowl policy: a protected permanent job with guaranteed retirement benefits) on graduation. He just did not expect that he would ever use English in the future. In my opinion, Hong’s efforts in oral English class were for the sole purpose of passing the course with a satisfactory grade.

Tao, from the first pair in Group B, was also from the Three Gorges area; he grew up in a small town next to the largest city in the area. I read through his journal and knew that he passed the entrance examination with the highest score in his high school. He was the pride of his hometown. After entering the university, he realized that oral English was the weakest among all his subjects. However, he was confident that he had the ability to catch up with other better students; it would just take more effort. One day he wrote in his journal, “I want to make my parents always be proud of me”!

Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) conceptualized seven components of L2 motivation. One of the components, instrumentality, “refers to the perceived pragmatic benefits of L2 proficiency and reflects the recognition that for many language learners it is the usefulness of L2 proficiency that provides the greatest driving force” (p. 21). I contend that all three minority students from the Three Gorges area presented “instrumental motivation” in their oral English learning. Ai was planning to be an English tourist guide, and his oral English learning motivation was to meet a job requirement. Both Hong and Tao were motivated to learn oral English for a practical reason—to achieve a satisfying course grade. Hong and Tao’s motivation to study reflected a Chinese cultural feature, “collectivism” (Rao, 2006). Rao (2006) writes:

Chinese society is marked by a strong tradition of filial piety and familism which encompass a nonindividual collectivistic orientation among the Chinese (Brislin, 1993). Such a social orientation has resulted in dependence emphasizing society (Yang, 1992) with a strong sense of collectivism (Biggs, 1996). (p. 431)

This orientation makes Chinese students attach their success or failure not just to themselves, but also to their families, friends and even their student work groups. In order to obtain achievement, Chinese students firmly believe in hard work and effort (Rao, 2006). Hong and Tao’s hard work and effort were aimed at bringing their families money and pride.

The last minority student, Ping, did not finish his task at all. He was the only exception among all my sample students. He is from the northwest of China, a remote agriculture province where the economy has not yet developed. In China, although

minority students are normally allowed to enter university with lower test scores than majority students, the quality of education offered them by the government, prior to university entrance, is highly deficient. Few people want to teach in these impoverished areas; resources, educational materials and teaching equipment are in constant short supply (Kwong & Xiao, 1989; Lin, 1997; Sautman, 1999; Wang & Phillion, 2009). In his journal, Ping told me that before he entered university he had only heard his English teachers read English. He began to learn how to use English speech when he entered university. Perhaps it was because Ping had no oral English training at the secondary level, and began to learn to speak English while learning to speak Mandarin (he developed his Chinese literacy through Mandarin) at the same time that I observed that he was always quiet in my class. Unlike in group work, where he might get by without speaking, pair work put him front and center. Apparently, Ping's cultural background as a minority student brought him learning challenges. In the village where he grew up, he had little access to Mandarin. In college, he had to study in a Han majority cultural context. Becoming familiar with the Han culture and a second language culture, at the same time, made Ping's learning more difficult than his peers efforts. His case made me realize that students' sociocultural backgrounds play important roles in helping teachers to really understand their learning difficulties.

Summary

In chapter four, I explained that during phase one of the study, using group and pair work and various communicative activities, I structured my class teaching to promote students' oral English social interactions in an EFL environment. In phase two of the study, looking from the perspectives of meaning negotiation and sociocultural

interaction, I analyzed students' social interaction characteristics for oral English learning. Next I assessed students' oral communicative competence and analyzed how they developed their competence. Finally, I compared rural, urban and minority students' responses to a communicative approach for their oral English learning.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Implications

Conclusion

For Chinese EFL learners at the secondary level, English learning is very much test-oriented and oral English learning is usually neglected. As a result, entering college, most students have a history of limited oral English training beginning with their first college level oral English class. Moreover, the reality is that the strong influence of traditional rote learning pedagogy, limited class time, students' diversity, large-sized classes and a non-ideal second language learning environment make oral English teaching and learning very challenging. On the other hand, since 1978, Chinese EFL education purpose developed from utilitarian (Hu, 2005a) to quality education (Hu, 2005a; Tsang, 2000), focusing on English language communicative competence. At the beginning of the 21st century, developing students' English communicative competence, especially oral English, in keeping with national economic development and increasing interaction with the world (Beckett & Macpherson, 2005) deserves more attention in EFL education in China. College students face both academic and future career requirements and it has become necessary to research oral English instructional pedagogy that can better help students to develop their oral English communicative competence in an EFL environment.

For this research, I have depended on aspects of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory for guidance in determining the underpinnings of my theoretical framework. With an understanding of the primacy of social interaction on human development, I applied a collaborative, communication-oriented pedagogical approach in a large-sized Chinese oral English class to promote students' social interactions for oral English learning. My

investigation looked at what happened when a collaborative, communication-oriented pedagogy was applied in a large-sized oral English class within a Chinese university EFL environment. Using practitioner action research methodology, my students and I went through two phases of action research, looking for answers to my research question. After data analysis and discussion, I draw the following conclusions from my study.

First, for second language learners' oral English learning in an EFL environment, a communicative approach helped to promote and facilitate learners' oral English social interactions through group and pair work and various in-class and after-class communicative activities. Group and pair work created more opportunities for large numbers of students to engage in oral English social interactions; this form of class organization facilitated students' social interactions in three ways. First, through consistent group or pair work, group members learn to trust in each other and therefore created an easy and relaxed environment for their social interactions, allowing them to not worry about making errors or losing face during the social interaction process. Second, through competitive group work, students' intention to outperform other groups promoted their oral English social interaction quality and efficiency. Third, through various and persistent group activities, students became familiar with group work and class performance routine, so that they were able to save precious class time for more practice in oral English social interaction.

Applying communicative activities in an oral English class also promoted students' social interactions for oral English learning. More importantly it facilitated students' social interactions in the following ways: (a) Communicative activities offered students opportunities to choose the appropriate communication need matching their own

English level, so that they can practice their oral English social interactions more efficiently; (b) communicative activities, especially after-class activities, enabled students to actively collaborate and to self-arrange and plan for their oral English social interactions in a systematic way, which allowed them to develop a clearer understanding of oral English social interaction purposes; (c) students actively reflected on their communicative activities to discover their learning achievements and to promote learning interest and confidence. Additionally, through their self reflections, they also elicited learning difficulties that needed to be resolved; (d) students' practicing of communicative activities changed the traditional EFL teacher's dominant role in class. Instead of being teacher-centered, EFL teachers assisted students' learning through modeling, instructing and providing positive feedback. EFL teachers' modeling include conversations with volunteers in class and with application of new vocabulary and speaking routines, so that other students could start their oral English social interaction somewhat easier. Positive feedback was aimed at promoting students' motivation to practice oral English social interaction.

Second, in looking at students' oral English social interactions, from a cognitive perspective, I observed that my students applied "clarification requests, confirmation and comprehension checks" as meaning negotiation moves to reach second language comprehension. My students applied three means to raise clarification requests: asking direct questions, remaining silent and echoing. They used two means to conduct confirmation checks: repeating interlocutor's utterance with a rising tone and paraphrasing interlocutor's message. Finally, through "asking direct questions and using body language followed by a pause", my students conducted comprehension checks in

the process of meaning negotiation. Meanwhile, while in the process of their meaning negotiations, students were pushed to produce more comprehensible oral English output. Both sides of a conversation had opportunities to produce comprehensible output and so their comprehensible output usually developed from the semantic level to the syntactic level.

From a sociocultural perspective, I looked into the collaborations and assistance between students-students and students-EFL teacher. I observed that students realized their peers' collaborations mainly through "co-construction, self-correction and encouragement", but did not use "other-correction" in their process because of their Confucian cultural influence. They also collaborated with the EFL teacher (me) in their learning process. My assistance in students' oral English social interaction learning was to explain, direct and give feedback. I often explained the sociocultural rules of English and directed students' in their self-learning process to gain more exposure to English speaking cultures and so improve their understanding. My feedback consisted not only of positive encouragement; it also provided critical feedback for students' future improvement.

Third, referencing the three components as suggested by Canale and Swain (1980), I conclude that students did develop oral communicative competence through a communicative approach. For grammatical competence, students developed their utterances from the semantic level to the syntactic level, learned more English vocabulary and also reinforced their previous grammar. For sociolinguistic competence, students developed certain speaking routines which are appropriate for English speaking countries, like how to make an appointment. They also developed many useful English phrases and

use of slang—which can be powerful and appropriate for certain English speaking contexts. At the stage of our research, students had a tendency to speak short English sentences; therefore, not many students had developed speech coherence. Class activities with obvious themes and requirements appeared to regulate students' speech cohesion. For strategic competence, students constantly applied diverse strategies, such as avoidance strategies, achievement strategies, stalling strategies, self-monitoring strategies and interactional strategies in trying to maintain their conversation. Students also developed their understanding of the concept of communicative competence, which I state is an additional indicator for students' oral communicative competence development. Their understanding of oral communicative competence not only reflected grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competence, but also included the competence of understanding others.

Fourth, after investigating how students developed their oral communicative competence, I conclude that students' social interaction facilitates oral communicative competence development through meaning negotiation and EFL teacher and or learners' collaboration and assistance. In the process of students' social interactions, students' negotiation moves, such as clarification requests, pushed them to reorganize their English speaking, forcing them to come up with a more accurate English word or phrase, and to repeat or elaborate their English utterances. While speakers reorganized, coming up with a new vocabulary and reorganizing previous speaking, their peers collaborated with him or her by providing direct verbal assistance, body language, indirect assistance of self-correction (for the purpose of providing a language model), and gave emotional encouragement. The EFL teacher also encouraged students speaking and explaining new

vocabulary after students' unsuccessful attempts. The result is that through students meaning negotiations and EFL teacher and peers' collaboration and assistance, students developed their utterances from the semantic level to the syntactic level; they also increased vocabulary and reinforced previous grammar.

Students developed utterances appropriate to certain English language sociocultural rules mainly through the EFL teacher's assistance and peers' collaboration. My lectures and clarifications on cultural knowledge of certain English speaking societies and recommendations of additional learning resources provided materials for students to practice their oral English social interactions. After my introduction of English speaking societies and cultures, students applied certain sociocultural rules in their collaborative conversations with peers. Students also learned a little about sociocultural conversation routines by carefully observing peers' performances in class. In the process of meaning negotiation, students had opportunities to practice English slangs or phrases, such as using "are you kidding"? or "I beg your pardon"? to ask a confirmation question or raise a clarification request. Therefore, students develop their second language sociocultural rules applications through meaning negotiations, EFL teacher's assistance and peer's collaborations.

A few students developed their application of the "rules of discourse" through meaning negotiations and peers' collaborations. Through social interaction, students conducted meaning negotiation moves to elaborate their speaking and to clarify their understanding. In the process of elaboration and clarification speaking, peers assisted and collaborated with each other. By the end of a conversation, speakers had developed a cohesive description using diverse grammatical functions, while interlocutors also

developed a more complete and clear understanding, applying grammatical functions to draw their conclusions. Activities with clear themes seemed to help students develop coherent conversations.

Students' strategic competence development was reflected by their applications of speaking strategies in their social interactions. Students applied different speaking strategies to solve communicative breakdowns and reach second language comprehension; they also applied speaking strategies to co-construct their utterances with peers. Therefore, students also developed their strategic competence through meaning negotiations and peer's collaborations.

Lastly, students from rural and urban areas usually responded actively and positively toward our collaborative, communication-oriented pedagogy for oral English learning. I conclude that communicative activities enable students to actively engage in their own learning process. As discussed earlier, minority students' cultural backgrounds influenced their response to a collaborative, communication-oriented pedagogy, so students' sociocultural backgrounds deserve teachers' attention for the purpose of improving class teaching.

Implications for Large-sized Oral English Classes in an EFL Environment

One of my research intentions is to contribute to EFL oral instruction in an effort to benefit students in large-sized classes, students who would normally be subjected to passive-learning pedagogy for their EFL learning experience. I have concluded that a collaborative communication-oriented pedagogy promotes and facilitates learners' social interactions in an EFL environment and that such social interactions facilitate their second language oral communicative competence development through meaning

negotiation with EFL teacher and learners' collaboration and assistance. Realizing the efficacy of a communicative approach for EFL oral instruction, my suggestion for oral English teaching in classes with high numbers of students, within an EFL environment, include the following considerations: how to arrange classes to apply various communicative activities, and how to encourage collaboration at different levels so as to enhance skill and understanding of communicative competence.

Arranging class organization. Usually in a typical Chinese classroom, there are more than 35 students sitting individually. For the purpose of developing oral English communicative competence, arranging students into groups or pairs will increase opportunities for them to engage in second language social interactions. In addition, group members' trust and group competition can promote students' social interaction efficiency. When arranging students into groups or pairs, the EFL teacher should mix students of different levels to promote peers' assistance. Students with intermediate and advanced speaking levels could assist the EFL teacher by helping their classmates. While they are helping classmates with beginning speaking levels, they also have the opportunity to reinforce their oral English speaking or develop new speaking knowledge. In addition, I suggest keeping the group formation consistent, because students working with each other over time will become familiar with their group's work routines. Knowing group work routines can save class time, which is critical for students' social interactions for oral English learning in an EFL environment. Finally EFL teachers should make good use of journal exchanges with their students. Through journals, teachers can ask whether students feel comfortable working with group members or not.

If they see too many conflicts inside the group, an EFL teacher can switch some of the team members with other groups.

Applying various class activities. EFL instructors applying communicative activities in a language class, especially within an EFL environment, should consider the students' second language levels and also the learning resources available in their location. Orienting activities toward social interaction tends to change a boring learning style to one of far greater interest. Instead of sitting quietly, reciting English messages from a text, students become actively engaged in understanding social activities and interactions within a second language cultural context, or they may use their second language to introduce their own culture. Every time students complete a speaking task and realize a purpose (such as introducing Chinese culture, ordering food, making an appointment, or winning an argument) by using their second language, they achieve a sense of success, and therefore increase their learning confidence and motivation to improve their second language learning.

I suggest that interactive, oral English learning activities be conducted both inside and outside class. Communicative activities should be applied as normal class routine, instead of only as an add-on for rote learning. In-class activities should require students' instant response through social interactions in English. Applying activities that are rich in second language contexts, along with activities that are related to students' lives and communication needs in various contexts, can offer students the opportunity to conduct English conversations and so help them to develop oral communicative competence. Activities which are rich in second language contexts are helpful for students' sociolinguistic competence development. However, sociolinguistic competence is only

one component of communicative competence. Activities that do not reflect second language context but are related to learners' own life experiences can also stimulate students' learning interest and offer them opportunities to develop grammatical and strategic competence. In addition, I suggest applying information gap activities and activities which involve group competition. Compared to reciting English messages from textbooks, students are highly interested and motivated to compete with each other. In-class activities can easily involve the EFL teacher's assistance and collaboration. It is also much easier for EFL instructors to supervise students' oral English only usage for in-class activities.

Due to the size of my class and the lack of sufficient weekly class time, I suggest after-class activities for oral English learning as well. Since any after class learning would necessarily take place in an EFL environment, I had to require groups to practice together as a means of maintaining the possibility of oral English practice. Learners need to use extra time preparing after-class activities. After-class activities are really helpful for large-sized class teaching, because class time is so limited for students' in-class practice. Although after-class activities could not guarantee that students, exclusively, used their second language for communication, it did enable students to play active roles in their learning by allowing them to plan and arrange their own second language learning in a systematic way. It also provided them more opportunities to realize peers' collaborations in the learning process. While students spent extra after-class time to prepare for their oral English social interactions in class, they usually resorted to extra learning resources and to asking for extra teacher's assistance to facilitate their oral English social interactions.

Encouraging collaborations at different levels. As an EFL instructor engaged in practitioner action research, I learned with my students that both forms of our collaboration, whether students with other students or my students with me, were necessary for oral English learning in our EFL environment. I suggest that instructors should not only encourage students' collaboration in their learning process, but should also work as a collaborator with students throughout the process.

The collaboration between students and students. Promoting students' collaborations, I again suggest that teachers keep consistent group or pair work in class. Students need time to know each other and to build up members' trust in each other for better collaboration. Activities with competition also proved to better unite groups as a team for collaborations, so competition should be applied on a regular basis in the oral English class. Journal exchanges between students and teacher helped in building mutual understanding. I suggest that students within groups can also apply journal exchanges with each other, like building a pen pal cycle. Through journal sharing, they have a chance to know classmates' learning difficulties, achievements and even personalities. It can also help train students' English writing skills.

The collaboration between EFL instructors and students. In an EFL learning environment, a communicative approach enables the EFL teacher to play a collaborative and assisting role in the students' learning process. I suggest the following ways to promote EFL teacher's assistance and collaboration.

Modeling. EFL instructors (in China) have to show enthusiasm for oral English, so as to convince students that written tests are not the only purpose for learning a second language. The teacher's language modeling should include students with different

speaking levels from the class. A speaking model, which involves students' participation, should show students that achieving second language oral competence is possible, and therefore improve their confidence and interest to speak. Also, during the modeling process, the EFL instructor's "quiet moments" (on purpose or not on-purpose) can offer students opportunities to engage in the conversation by "helping" instructors out of a "difficult moment", without worrying about making errors themselves. In order to better organize an effective learning model for students, EFL instructors should continuously improve themselves so that they are always qualified to be the role model.

Explaining. EFL instructors should be aware that introducing second language cultural knowledge is necessary for students' oral communicative competence development, especially their sociolinguistic competence. They should not assume that students will get to know second language cultural knowledge on their own, through the use of the internet. In EFL environments, instructors need to recommend appropriate, detailed learning resources to learners. While students practice social interaction in their second language, EFL instructors should not interrupt them or correct their speaking errors very often. Instead, they should encourage students to try different ways to achieve comprehensibility by negotiating meaning. After students have made several attempts without success, instructors may add enough new information to reinforce students' understanding and learning.

Encouraging learners' self-reflections. In order to collaborate effectively with learners, an EFL instructor should offer students opportunities to reflect on their learning. I found journal exchanges to be a secure and effective way for instructors to ask opinions and to get to know students' learning difficulties and expectations. Just as important to

students' learning was the opportunity to see teachers' reflections on their teaching successes and difficulties. Sharing reflections and soliciting student input for class activity changes can help classes to adjust and improve their learning along the way.

Considering students' variability. In different parts of the world, student demographics, such as gender, education and minority distributions, will vary considerably from the population of students in my study. I must clarify that my suggestion of taking students' diversity into consideration for oral English teaching is limited to a Chinese learning context. In China, students from rural and urban areas have diverse English training at the secondary level. Usually, students from urban areas have better learning resources and better-trained EFL teachers. A communicative approach for our oral English class changed the normally passive oral English rote learning routine into something that could motivate both rural and urban students' oral English learning. Students from both areas adopted positive attitudes towards oral English social interaction. My experience shows that EFL instructors in China will likely find that students from rural areas are just as capable of developing communicative competence with more effective training, even though their English training at the secondary level may have been weaker. However, students from urban and rural areas do have different learning expectations, and so EFL teachers will need to adjust their teaching plans to address a range of students' learning expectations.

Minority students in Chinese oral English classes can put forth challenges for EFL teachers. With China's economic development, there will be many more minority students attending college. Most minority students are from areas that are either still underdeveloped or may be going through rapid changes, which include economic,

cultural and social changes. According to my research, minority students' cultural backgrounds can greatly influence their learning in class. Realizing and understanding minority students' social backgrounds can help EFL teachers to better evaluate their learning needs, which in turn should help in improving minority students' learning. A deeper understanding of minority students may help EFL teachers avoid some possible resistance by making early adjustments to the learning process.

The collaboration between administrators and EFL instructors. Aside from teaching their classes, teachers must also follow diverse institutional rules, formal or otherwise. My teaching environment for this research was one of a Chinese context, despite the subject being taught. I suggest that for oral English teaching to be successful in China, collaboration between school administrators and EFL instructors is essential. During the whole research process, I was very lucky to be allowed the freedom to arrange my teaching content and methodology without strictly obeying the foreign language department's curriculum. This freedom made it possible for my students to have the opportunity to develop their oral English communicative competence in a more effective manner.

In all cases, oral English teaching in China requires administrators' collaboration and approval, and EFL teachers should be aware of this. Chinese education administrators should maintain their policies on oral English education according to central government directives. Textbooks and class materials should be chosen carefully and renewed with the pace and development of society. Especially now, in the new era, English education in China has focused more on developing learners' communicative competence. Textbooks and class materials should be aimed at developing students'

communicative competences, such as sociolinguistic and strategic competence, instead of solely focusing on English grammar learning. Administrators should consider allowing EFL instructors' greater autonomy in choosing their course learning materials since the EFL instructor will likely have a better understanding of their students' oral English learning history.

Introducing and nurturing communicative competence. In the new era, English education in China has become largely focused on developing learners' communicative competence; however, the traditional rote teaching approach is still prevalent in many institutions, especially at the secondary level. I believe it is past the time to introduce the oral communicative competence concept at the secondary level, because nurturing a second language communicative competence in an EFL environment requires time and consistent training. This kind of training needs to involve students with social interaction for consistent second language learning. Through their practice, they will have opportunities to develop new grammar knowledge, understand more cultural knowledge and apply more speaking strategies. Most importantly, they will have opportunities to self-reflect on their oral English learning and form their own understanding of the concept of oral communicative competence. Students' development of oral communicative competence would also help to reduce resistance to a communicative approach at the college level. Meanwhile, most students (except English majors) at college level only have the first two years for English learning, but they will face their career requirements two years after they have stopped their English studies. Since there are no English course requirements for non majors in the last two years of college, school administrators should consider setting up elective courses for students

who have an interest and desire to further develop their second language oral communicative competence. Schools should also develop online courses that could help in developing communicative competence; they could also arrange for EFL instructors to organize workshops to assist students' further development.

Research Significance

It has always been a challenge to help students of large-sized classes to develop their oral communicative competence. My research findings indicate a possible solution for EFL oral instruction in non-English speaking environments that can benefit large-sized classes of students to develop oral communicative competence. Consistently conducting communicative activities inside and outside of class, in groups and pairs, promotes students' social interactions for oral English learning and gradually facilitates their oral communicative competence. By researching how students develop their second language oral communicative competence in an EFL environment, I hope to add knowledge to second language development in a non-target language speaking environment. If this research should help to prepare Chinese college students to better meet the academic and advanced requirements of their future occupations, within a steadily developing Chinese economy, I will be satisfied in my efforts. Perhaps it will allow them to play a part in the advancement of globalization, in terms of their second language ability. Finally, it is my wish that this research might offer sufficient empirical evidence to convince Chinese school administrators to consider modifying the traditional curriculum currently used for teaching oral English.

Future Research

Expectations for my ongoing research include an even deeper look into communicative activities that can help to realize and facilitate students' oral English social interactions within an EFL environment. I have already mentioned that after-class activities cannot guarantee students will exclusively apply English in their social interactions. In further studies I will research activities, especially after-class activities that enhance students' oral English social interactions, collaborations and assistance. If there is a means by which I can increase students' social interaction, while getting them to use their second language almost exclusively, then that means must be the goal of my immediate future research.

A second possible research direction would be to compare students' experiences of a communicative approach for oral English learning. Every two years, EFL instructors in Chinese colleges begin teaching new incoming students. By comparing different cohorts' oral English learning experiences, I can determine the similarities and differences in students' developmental process as it relates to their English learning histories. Most especially, differences reflected from their developmental process can help me to further develop my conclusion of how social interactions facilitate second language learners' oral language development within an EFL environment.

John-Steiner and Mahn (1996) write that "throughout his work Vygotsky used the dialectical method to analyze, explain, and describe interrelationships fundamental to human development where others posited dichotomies" (p. 195). They define the dialectical method as something that "surmounts dichotomies by looking at phenomena as syntheses of contradictions" (p. 195). In my opinion, students' second language social

interaction and second language communicative competence are dynamically interrelated. From my research, I conclude that in an EFL learning environment, social interaction facilitates second language learners' oral communicative competence development through meaning negotiation and the collaboration and assistance amongst the class. Because of my findings in this research, a possible future research interest might be to focus on how students with a developed oral communicative competence conduct their second language social interactions in an EFL environment. Will their second language social interactions reflect different characteristics compared to their earlier state of development? At the early stage of their social interactions, students mainly applied comprehension and confirmation checks, along with clarification requests, to negotiate meaning. Generally, they applied co-construction, self-correction and encouragement in their collaborative learning. Will they apply different manners to negotiate meaning with a developed communicative competence? Will they show different characteristics to realize and advance their collaborative learning? Understanding second language learners' social interaction characteristics, after they have developed to a certain level of communicative competence, can help me to better understand a more complete picture of second language learners' social interaction characteristics in an EFL environment. The dialectically and dynamically interrelated relationship between social interaction in second language and oral communicative competence deserves more in-depth study.

Appendix A: Questionnaire

(Students had a Chinese edition of the questionnaire)

Name: _____

Sex: _____

Ethnic group: _____

Years of English learning _____

Which city are you from? _____

What kind of dialect do you speak? _____

Instruction: Please read the following questionnaire carefully and choose the statement that most fits you.

1. I speak English_____.
a. not at all b. poorly c. average d. fairly well e. fluently
2. If I don't speak English, mostly I speak_____.
a. Mandarin b. hometown dialect
3. My speaking ability is_____.
a. the weakest of my English language skills
b. only a little weaker than my other English language skills
c. about the same as my other English language skills
d. better than my other English language skills
e. much better than my other English language skills
4. Since I began learning English, I have practiced my oral English_____.
a. not at all b. not often c. fairly often d. very often e. all the time

5. I have practiced my oral English by means of (you may choose more than one answer) _____.
- a. reciting English articles
 - b. drill pattern practice with classmates
 - c. reading aloud
 - d. performing short plays in English
 - e. English Corner/Club
 - f. talking with English teachers or native English speakers
 - g. answering questions in English
 - h. attending English training centers
 - i. hiring English tutors to practice with
 - i. participating in international activities
 - k. practicing with family members
 - l. (Other) _____.
6. I use original English resources, such as movies, songs, magazines, TV programs, and radio to help in practicing my English learning_____.
- a. not at all b. not often c. fairly often d. very often e. all the time
7. If I have an oral English assignment, I will_____.
- a. get bored and ignore it
 - b. wait until the last minute and do part of it
 - c. meet the minimum requirement
 - d. give it more than the minimum effort
 - e. do it immediately and try my best

8. I find studying oral English _____.
- a. not important at all
 - b. less important than reading, writing and listening
 - c. as important as reading, writing and listening
 - d. slightly more important than reading, writing and listening
 - e. far more important than reading, writing and listening
9. If I think my oral English ability is good enough, I will try to show my competence_____.
- a. not at all
 - b. a little
 - c. fairly often
 - d. very often
 - e. all the time
10. During English classes, I would like to improve my oral English ability_____.
- a. not at all
 - b. a little
 - c. an average amount
 - d. much
 - e. very much
11. If I have good mastery of oral English competence, I can_____.
- (You may choose more than one).
- a. make more friends
 - b. find a job in an international company
 - c. impress family members and friends
 - d. study abroad
 - e. tutor others and make some money

- f. travel abroad more easily
- g. be more qualified and competitive in the job market
- h. understand more about Western culture
- i. introduce Chinese culture to Westerners
- j. graduate from college with less trouble
- k. (Other) _____.

12. I would like to have more opportunities to practice my oral English in class_____.
- a. not at all b. not much c. normally d. much e. very much
13. I would like oral English practice to include many types of activities_____.
- a. not at all b. not much c. normally d. much e. very much
14. I have worked with classmates before in practicing oral English _____.
- a. not at all b. not often c. fairly often d. very often e. all the time
15. I think group work is necessary for oral English classes_____.
- a. not at all b. not much c. normally d. much e. very much
16. I like working with _____in a group.
- a. my friends b. my roommates c. whomever d. top students e. no one
17. I would like drama material provided by_____.
- (You may choose more than one).
- a. the teacher
 - b. myself
 - c. group input

d. the group leader

e. class input

18. I would like the drama material to be in the form of_____.

(You may choose more than one).

a. Chinese fairytales

b. English language scripts

c. original group creations

d. articles from English language text books

e. (Other) _____.

Appendix B: Self-report

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. Content of class activities today:
2. What did you do to prepare for your part?
3. Difficulties in communicating today.
4. Difficulties listening or understanding?
5. Interesting parts or boring parts?
6. What kind of support do you want in the future?

Appendix C: Group Report

Team number: _____ Time: _____ Place: _____

A. Content		
B. Major decision made by the group	Decision	Reasons for decision
C. Resources used		
D. Steps to prepare for your presentation		
E. Help the group wants		

Appendix D: Peer Feedback

Team number: _____ Date: _____

- Content.
- Did you understand the content of the performance? Is the subject and content of the performance interesting to you?
- What did you notice in this English performance that can help your English improve?

Appendix E: Questionnaire about Understanding Development

Date: _____

Name: _____

1. What is communicative competence?
2. What can you do to improve your communicative competence?

Appendix F: Phase One Study IRB Approval Letter and Consent Form



THE UNIVERSITY of
NEW MEXICO
Main Campus Institutional Review Board
Human Research Protections Office
MSC08 4560
1 University of New Mexico-Albuquerque, NM 87131-0001
<http://hsc.unm.edu/som/research/HRRC/>

23-Sep-2010

Responsible Faculty: Shelley Roberts
Investigator: Feng Luo
Dept/College: Language Literacy Sociocultural LL

SUBJECT: IRB Determination of Exempt Status
Protocol #: 10-387

Project Title: Developing Spoken English competence in an EFL Environment: Collaborative Strategies of a Chinese ESL Teacher and Her Students

Approval Date: 23-Sep-2010

The Main Campus Institutional Review Board has reviewed the above-mentioned research protocol and determined that the research is *exempt* from the requirements of Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) regulations for the protection of human subjects as defined in 45CFR46.101(b) under category 1, based on the following:

1. HRPO Application received 082110
2. UNM consent form v083010
3. Teacher Evaluation form received 071910
4. Study questionnaire received 071910
5. Interview questions received 071910

Because it has been granted exemption, this research project is not subject to continuing review.

Changes to the Research: It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to inform the IRB of any changes to this research. A change in the research may disqualify this project from exempt status. Reference the protocol number and title in all documents related to this protocol.

Sincerely,

J. Scott Tonigan, PhD
Chair
Main Campus IRB

**The University of New Mexico IRB
Consent to Participate in Research**

**Developing Adult's Oral English Communicative Competence in an EFL Environment:
Collaborative Strategies of a Chinese ESL Teacher and Her Students**

Purpose and General Information

You are being asked to participate in a research study that is being done by Feng Luo, who is the Principal Investigator, and her supervisor Dr. Holbrook Mahn. This research is being done to evaluate effective oral English pedagogies suitable for Chinese university students in a foreign language environment. You are being asked to participate because your oral English communicative competence improvement is our major concern. Approximately 40 people will take part in this study at Wuhan University of Science and Technology, Wuhan, China.

This form will explain the study to you, including the possible risks as well as the possible benefits of participating. This is so you can make an informed choice about whether or not to participate in this study. Please read this Consent Form carefully. Ask the investigators or study staff to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand.

What will happen if I participate?

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to read and sign this Consent Form. After you sign the Consent Form, the following things will happen: You will be asked to fill out a questionnaire to investigate your oral English learning experience. You will be asked to report and reflect on oral English activities preparation. You will be asked to evaluate your classmates' class performance. You will be asked to reflect on what you have learned in the class. You will be interviewed by the investigator about your learning experience with the collaborative communication-oriented oral English activities. Your reflections and your class preparations will be audio recorded to allow for review and a deeper understanding of how communicative competence develops in English through collaborative communications. You can choose whether to be audio recorded or not when you participate in class activities discussions and are interviewed by the teacher. If you consent to an audio recording and then decide that you would prefer not to have done so, the recording will be summarily erased.

Participation in this study will take a total of 45 hours over a period of 18 weeks.

What are the possible risks or discomforts of being in this study?

Every effort will be made to protect the information you give us. However, there is a small risk of loss of confidentiality that may result in hardship, stress, emotional distress, and inconvenience.

How will my information be kept confidential?

Your name and other identifying information will be maintained in locked files, available only to authorized members of the research team, for the duration of the study. For any information entered into a computer, the only identifier will be a unique study identification (ID) number. Any personal identifying information and any record linking that information to study ID numbers will be destroyed when the study is completed. Information resulting from this study will be used for research purposes and may be published; however, you will not be identified by name in any publications.

HRPO #: 12-126

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Version: 03-29-2012

APPROVED: 03-29-12

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EXPIRES:



UNM

Human Research Protections Office

The University of New Mexico Institutional Review Board (HRRC/MCIRB)

Information from your participation in this study may be reviewed by department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies at the College of Education, University of New Mexico, federal and state regulatory agencies, and by the UNM IRB which provides regulatory and ethical oversight of human research.

What are the benefits to being in this study?

There may or may not be direct benefit to you from being in this study. However, your participation may help find out a more suitable pedagogy for second language learning in China that meets the needs of diverse learners trying to learn to speak English in a non-English speaking environment.

What other choices do I have if I don't participate?

Taking part in this study is voluntary so you can choose not to participate.

Can I stop being in the study once I begin?

Yes. You can withdraw from this study at any time without affecting your grades for this oral English course. You may also decide to rejoin the study at any time.

The investigators have the right to end your participation in this study if they determine that you no longer qualify to take part, if you do not follow study procedures, or if it is in your best interest or the study's best interest to stop your participation. Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies at the College of Education, UNM may stop the study at any time.

What if I have questions or complaints about this study?

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints at any time about the research study, Feng Luo, a doctoral candidate, or her associates will be glad to answer them at 13627208623(China) or email to hmahn@unm.edu, available 8am to 5pm daily. If you would like to speak with someone other than the research team, you may call the UNM IRB office at (505) 277-0067. The IRB is a group of people from UNM and the community who provide independent oversight of safety and ethical issues related to research involving human subjects.

What are my rights as a research subject?

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may call the IRB at (505) 277-0067 or visit the IRB website at <http://hsc.unm.edu/som/research/HRRRC/maincampusirbhome.shtml>.

Consent and Authorization

You are making a decision whether to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you read the information provided (or the information was read to you). By signing this Consent Form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights as a research subject.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and all questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing this Consent Form, I agree to participate in this study and give permission for my health information to be used or disclosed as described in this Consent Form. A copy of this Consent Form will be provided to me.

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APPROVED: 03-29-12	OFFICIAL USE ONLY	EXPIRES:
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Name of Adult Participant (print)

Signature of Adult Participant Date

I have explained the research to the subject and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information in this consent form and freely consents to participate.

Name of Research Team Member

Signature of Research Team Member/Date

HRPO #: 12-126

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Version: 03-29-2012

APPROVED: 03-29-12

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EXPIRES:



UNM

Human Research Protections Office

The University of New Mexico Institutional Review Board (HRRC/MCIRB)

Appendix G: Phase Two Study IRB Approval Letter and Consent Form



THE UNIVERSITY of
NEW MEXICO

Main Campus Institutional Review Board
Human Research Protections Office
MSC08 4560

1 University of New Mexico-Albuquerque, NM 87131-0001
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29-Mar-2012

Responsible Faculty: Holbrook Mahn
Investigator: Feng Luo
Dept/College: College of Education COE

SUBJECT: IRB Determination of Exempt Status
Protocol #: 12-126

Project Title: Developing Adult's Oral English Communicative Competence in an EFL Environment: Collaborative Strategies of a Chinese Teacher and Her Students
Approval Date: 29-Mar-2012

The Main Campus Institutional Review Board has reviewed the above-mentioned research protocol and determined that the research is *exempt* from the requirements of Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) regulations for the protection of human subjects as defined in 45CFR46.101(b) under category 1, based on the following:

1. Study Exemption Determination Form submitted 03-09-12.
2. Informed Consent form version 03-29-12.
3. Study Protocol -Research Plan- submitted 03-21-12.
4. Acknowledgement of Wuhan University of Science and Technology letter of support dated 03-29-12

Because it has been granted exemption, this research project is not subject to continuing review.

Changes to the Research: It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to inform the IRB of any changes to this research. A change in the research may disqualify this project from exempt status. Reference the protocol number and title in all documents related to this protocol.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Scott Tonigan".

J. Scott Tonigan, PhD
Chair
Main Campus IRB

**The University of New Mexico Main Campus IRB
Consent to Participate in Research**

**Developing Spoken English Competence in an EFL Environment: Collaborative
Strategies of a Chinese ESL Teacher and Her Students**

Introduction

You are being asked to participate in a research study that is being done by Feng Luo, who is the Principal Investigator and her supervisor, Dr. Shelley Roberts, from the Department of College of Education, University of New Mexico. This research is studying effective oral English pedagogies suitable for Chinese students in a foreign language environment.

English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching in China has flourished with the development of the economy and globalization. However, the traditional way of teaching language still plays the major role in the classroom and has prevented my Chinese students from developing their second language fully, especially oral English. Rao (2002) summarizes a similar teaching routine for traditional language learning in many Chinese schools, such as: memorizing words and their meanings, analyzing the grammar of sentences and passages and ignoring communication using the second language. During my teaching practice in China, for 10 years, I have also found that, even after 6 years of EFL learning, most of my students had a hard time communicating with others in their second language. My students had grasped most of the language's grammar, but their communicative competence, especially in oral English, was poor. My interest is to research effective oral English pedagogies suitable for Chinese students in a foreign language environment.

You are being asked to participate in this study because your spoken English improvement is our major concern. Approximately 40 people will take part in this study at the University of Wuhan University of Science and Technology. Zero people will take part in this study at the University of New Mexico.

This form will explain the research study, and will also explain the possible risks as well as the possible benefits to you. We encourage you to talk with your family and friends before you decide to take part in this research study. If you have any questions, please ask one of the study investigators.

What will happen if I decide to participate?

If you agree to participate, the following things will happen:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to read and sign this Consent Form. After you sign the Consent Form, the following things will happen: You will be asked to take a questionnaire to investigate

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your spoken English learning experience; you will be asked to report all the after class spoken English preparation. You will be asked to evaluate your classmates' class performance. You will be asked to reflect on what you have learned in the class. Your performance will be videotaped and analyzed by the investigator. If you don't feel comfortable answering questions in the questionnaire or interview, you don't have to answer them.

How long will I be in this study?

Participation in this study will take a total of 64 hours over a period of 16 weeks.

What are the risks of being in this study?

- Every effort will be made to protect the information you give us. However, there is a small risk of loss of confidentiality that may result in hardship, stress, emotional distress, and inconvenience..
- There are risks of stress, emotional distress, inconvenience and possible loss of privacy and confidentiality associated with participating in a research study.

For more information about risks, ask one of the study investigators.

What are the benefits to being in this study?

There may or may not be direct benefit to you from being in this study. However, your participation may help determine effective spoken English teaching strategies suitable for large-sized classes (avg. 40+ students/class) and may prove more effective for second language learners who have a poor second language learning environment. .

What other choices do I have if I do not want to be in this study?

Taking part in this study is voluntary so you can choose not to participate. If you chose not to participate, this will not influence your status as a student in the class.

How will my information be kept confidential?

We will take measures to protect your privacy and the security of all your personal information, but we cannot guarantee confidentiality of all study data.

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Information contained in your study records is used by Feng Luo, in some cases it will be shared with the sponsor of the study. The University of New Mexico IRB that oversees human subject research, and Wuhan University of Science and Technology, Foreign Language School will be permitted to access your records. There may be times when we are required by law to share your information. However, your name will not be used in any published reports about this study.

All shared data will be kept in aggregate form only. Identified data will not be shared.

What are the costs of taking part in this study?

There is no additional cost involved with this study.

What will happen if I am injured or become sick because I took part in this study?

No commitment is made by the University of New Mexico (UNM) to provide free medical care or money for injuries to participants in this study. If you are injured or become sick as a result of this study, UNM will provide you with emergency treatment, at your cost. It is important for you to tell one of the study investigators immediately if you have been injured or become sick because of taking part in this study. If you have any questions about these issues, or believe that you have been treated carelessly in the study, please contact the Main Campus IRB Office at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87131, (505) 272-1129 for more information.

Will I be paid for taking part in this study?

There is no compensation for participation in this study.

How will I know if you learn something new that may change my mind about participating?

You will be informed of any significant new findings that become available during the course of the study, such as changes in the risks or benefits resulting from participating in the research or new alternatives to participation that might change your mind about participating.

Can I stop being in the study once I begin?

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to choose not to participate or to withdraw your participation at any point in this study without affecting any services to which you are entitled.

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If a subject becomes harmful toward himself/herself or others, within the study, they may be asked to withdraw from the study. Withdrawal can be in verbal and/or written form, and is effective immediately upon reception by the investigator.

Whom can I call with questions or complaints about this study?

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints at any time about the research study, Feng Luo, a doctoral student, or his/her associates Dr. Shelley Roberts will be glad to answer them at +86-27-630666699, +1-505-628-6826. If you need to contact someone after business hours or on weekends, please call +86-27-630666699 and ask for Feng Luo. If you would like to speak with someone other than the research team in regards to any complaints you have about the study, you may call the UNM IRB at (505) 272-1129.

Whom can I call with questions about my rights as a research subject?

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may call the UNM IRB at (505) 272-1129. The IRB is a group of people from UNM and the community who provide independent oversight of safety and ethical issues related to research involving human subjects. For more information, you may also access the IRB website at <http://hsc.unm.edu/som/research/HRRC/maincampusirbhome.shtml>.

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