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# COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION OF CHINESE ESL STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the communication apprehension (CA) as defined by Horwitz et al (1986) of a group of Chinese ESL secondary students in New Zealand. The relative importance of a number of sources (educational, social, and cultural) of CA which have been identified for Chinese students of English is considered. The relationship between CA, wait time and certain in-class practices such as questioning and voluntary speaking is examined. A further aspect of the study explores the ways in which students can articulate suggestions for coping with CA.

The relative importance of sources of CA is investigated by means of interviews, a ranking exercise and verbal reports. A questionnaire and "classroom" session further corroborate the sources of CA in relation to certain in-class practices and wait-time. Scenarios (hypothetical situations) are used to examine the strategies which these students considered effective for coping with CA.

Results indicated that language distance between Chinese and English contributed strongly to CA among Chinese ESL students because the two languages are substantially different in terms of language structure and use. Culture also emerged as an important dimension in CA in the present study

and that the students' cultural background affected their learning style, attitudes towards certain in-class practices and expectations in school. It was also found that speaking in front of the class and insufficient preparation were important sources of CA within the classroom. Students reported on both the affective and practical ways in which they attempted to cope with CA.

The thesis concludes with an examination of the methodological and theoretical implications of the study. The present research has highlighted the importance of applying the case study approach to further CA studies. It has also demonstrated that language distance, preparation time and affective variables are among some of the important elements which have been neglected by previous anxiety research. A number of tentative and practical recommendations from the study are proposed together with suggestions for further research.

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