Project Title :   Meeting the Challenge of Teaching and Learning Language in the University: Enhancing Linguistic Competence and Performance in English and Chinese

Leading University :   City University of Hong Kong

Participating UGC-funded University(ies) :   Hong Kong Baptist University, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Project Leader(s) :   Professor Jonathan WEBSTER, Director, The Halliday Centre for Intelligent Applications of Language Studies; Professor, Department of Linguistics and Translation, City University of Hong Kong

Summary of Proposal

This project aims to enhance university students' linguistic competence and performance in meeting the academic challenges of higher education. It integrates FOUR mutually inclusive and complementary sub-components to provide a multi-dimensional and balanced teaching and learning environment for upgrading English and Chinese language abilities.

The goal of Sub-component #1 is to develop an intelligent web-based system for university students to improve their proficiency in English as a Foreign Language writing tasks and prepare them to cope with more demanding writing tasks in both occupational and academic settings. Through the project, students will gain mastery both in comprehension and production of the full range of alternatives between what is common in everyday speaking, and what is often expected and thus required in academic writing.

The goal of Sub-component #2 is to ensure an effective upgrade of language ability and a lasting impact on all language learners with a discovery-enriched adventure of making sense of Chinese and English. The goal will be achieved via FIVE crucial components of learning: Motivation, Engagement, Relevance, Innovation, and Transferring of knowledge (MERIT). Through the implementation of discovery-enriched activities, the MERIT programme is designed to motivate students for active engagement in finding relevant issues and discovering innovative solutions for practical knowledge transfer.

Students will work together to create a website called Ask-Me-Why to share and publicize the learning outcomes.

Sub-component #3 aims at improving adult learners' Chinese language skills (both written and spoken Chinese (Cantonese and Putonghua)) and their ability to communicate through the creation of a web-based multi-modal environment for learners, known as the International Chinese Language Salon (ICLS). The ICLS platform will provide interactive speaking coaching and online writing tutoring, with individual feedback provided to each student, as well as a variety of online resources, such as video tutorials, audio recordings, useful grammatical and phonetic reference guides.

The goal of Sub-component #4 is to create An English Pronunciation Guide for Cantonese Students in Hong Kong, which will include (1) a description of the International Phonetic Alphabet, the universal system of symbols for representing speech sounds of human languages; (2) a description of the English sound system and a comparison of the sound systems of British English and North American English; (3) a description of the Cantonese sound system and a comparison between the Cantonese and English sound systems; and (4) lists of possible pronunciation errors in English made by Cantonese students.

<u>Summary of Final Report</u>

This project aimed to enhance university students' linguistic competence and performance in meeting the academic challenges of higher education. It included four sub-components which together strategically addressed critical issues of English language writing and spoken pronunciation, English and Chinese grammatical awareness, and communication skills in Chinese.

Sub-component #1 worked on developing an intelligent web-based system for university students to improve their proficiency in English as a Foreign Language writing tasks and prepare them to cope with more demanding writing tasks in both occupational and academic settings. Through the project, students could gain mastery both in comprehension and production of the full range of alternatives between what is common in everyday speaking, and what is required in occupational and academic settings. In addition, a web-based collaborative platform (http://www.formalwriter.com) has been developed to facilitate effective communication among students, language tutors and course instructors.

Sub-component #2 aimed to explain the 'unexplained' grammatical principles in English and Chinese and thereby enhance linguistic awareness of how grammar works. The current online platform Ask-Me-Why (https://grammar.lt.cityu.edu.hk) has innovatively and interactively offered support to build a pedagogical model that offers an openly available resource for interested language learners to post inquiries and share comments on both Chinese and English. In relation to building this Grammar Tutor, two teaching development grants were successfully completed to ensure that the project can feed into the FIVE crucial components of MERIT language learning for students: Motivation, Engagement, Relevance, Innovation, and Transferring of knowledge. The platform is ultimately significant in providing a long-term impact on all language learners with a discovery-enriched adventure of making sense of Chinese and English.

Sub-component #3 aimed to improve adult learners' Chinese language skills and their ability to communicate through the creation of a web-based multi-modal environment for learners. Regular sessions of the International Chinese Language Salon were conducted at CityU with promotion and participants from both CityU and HKBU. In addition, Chinese language enhancement workshops were also conducted on a regular basis at HKBU and CityU to help enhance adult learners to improve both their written (HKBU) and spoken (CityU) Chinese. Additional seminars on Chinese language enhancement were organized at both institutions to provide a variety of learning activities to the learners. The project also features the production of a multi-modal environment for learners via the project website (http://ipc.lt.cityu.edu.hk). The resources developed within the project component can shed light on adult Chinese language enhancement, and the effectiveness of extra-curriculum activities in higher education sector.

The goal of the sub-component #4 was to create An English Pronunciation Guide (The Guide) for Cantonese university students in Hong Kong. The Guide (1) included (a) a description of the English sound system and (b) a comparison between the English and Cantonese sound systems, and (2) listed all the possible pronunciation errors in English made by Cantonese students. The Guide was based on the spoken English audio-recorded from a large number of Cantonese university students, male and female. The Guide has received positive feedback from Cantonese students on the usefulness of learning English pronunciation and enhancement of a better understanding of the errors in English pronunciation made by Cantonese speakers.