

TESOL Conference: Learning a Second (or third) Language: How does it feel? Olga Istomina and Yi Zhang

I took the challenge to learn a third language and attended the Columbus TESOL conference session presented by Olga Istomina and Yi Zhang, “Learning a Second (or Third language): How does it feel?” Yi Zhang who was from “Zhong guó” or China, shared with us cultural and language differences between Chinese and the English language. The Chinese language is monosyllabic and non-inflectional, relies on four tones to create new words (flat, rising, rising and falling, and falling), is an ideographic language and does not have the “th” sound. Pronunciation of the word “thank you” will be “sank you”. She explained that depending on the native Chinese dialect, the Chinese student may have trouble differentiating among the English short vowel sounds and between the consonants /l/ and /r/. Ms. Zhang provided us with a Chinese Character Practice Template. I learned that each character is written in a four square template. It was very fascinating to experiment writing. The word America, which translates to “Mèi Guó”, uses two four square templates when written in Mandarin.

Her handouts and presentation included an article from the ESL magazine *Chinese Students in the U.S. Myths and reality*. It was worthy to note that the Chinese student may consider the American teacher as lazy because they don’t push them enough or because they engage them in group activities or games. This misconception is based on cultural differences of teacher’s expectations. I became aware that I need to explain the importance of class participation in learning to the Chinese students if I want to engage them in active partaking. We finished the session by also learning about the Russian language

I felt completely immersed into the Russian language when Olga started her presentation in an unfamiliar language. Olga enthusiasm and dynamic Russian introduction engaged the audience to listen carefully as we tried to comprehend her introductory Russian speech. This lively presentation was aided with visuals such as the Rye Bread and its display, songs (Russian Birthday Chant) and kinetic activities (a dance similar to the Sing around the Rosie) to emphasize on the adjectives vishini (high), nijini (low), shirini (wide) and ujini (narrow). As we kept reciting the song, the word Karavay (rye bread) was assimilated into my very limited Russian vocabulary. By the time I ended this TESOL workshop I had memorized a few words and was singing the whole chant “Vot Takoy vishini...”.

I really enjoyed participating in this workshop. It gave me an entertaining learning opportunity to try a third language. As a student I really need to tune my ear to listen attentively. As a teacher, the imperative usage of visuals, chants and physical activities in the classroom to engage the students into learning upholds to be true. Preparing and presenting your lesson plans with enthusiasm, visual aids and fun activities will definitely have positive results in the classroom.

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