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## Probing EFL Students' Language Skill Development in Tertiary Classrooms

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### Abstract

Research in second or foreign language learning indicates that for adult learners, the improvement of one language skill facilitates the development of other skills. The purpose of this study was to investigate the correlations among Chinese EFL students' reading, writing, and listening development by examining their test scores on the College English Test Band 4. The findings showed that the resultant correlation coefficients between reading and writing and between reading and listening were low and not statistically significant. However, there was a significant relationship between listening and writing. It was suggested that factors such as the homogeneous sample selected, students' motivation, and teaching methodology might affect the outcome of the research. The perceived implications of the research point to the importance of drawing close attention to teachers' efforts in cultivating and developing students' language skills evenly in the EFL context of China.

**Keywords:** Language skill development, Correlation, Reading, Writing, Listening, Chinese students

### 1. Introduction

How adolescents or adults learn a second or foreign language has intrigued researchers in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) for many decades. Research has revealed that children and adults are different in their respective language acquisition, in that children acquire their mother tongue or first language (L1) at an early age, picking it up in the linguistic environment where they are raised (Ellis, 1986, 1990; Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Adolescent or adult learners simply cannot do so when learning a second or foreign language (L2) not only because the environment for picking up a language in such a way is unavailable, but also because there are many additional factors which pertain to the adult learner, such as age, aptitude, intelligence, cognitive style, motivation, attitudes, learning styles and strategies, and personality (Brown, 2007; Krashen, 1982, 1985; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Mitchell & Myles, 2004). For most adolescents and adults, L2 learning takes place in the classroom, with grammar and reading the first language skills being targeted.

In English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts such as those in Japan, Korea, and China, reading has been the skill most emphasized in both traditional and modern EFL teaching. For example, English instruction at the tertiary level in China is usually the "intensive reading procedure," which consists of close study of short passages, including syntactic, semantic, and lexical analyses, followed by translation into the first language in order to study meaning (Susser & Robb, 1990). It is suggested from cognitive science that in learning L2 individuals must read and memorize sufficient correctly structured English sentences before they can speak and write them properly (Ellis, 1986, 1990).

For the great majority of EFL students, the development of the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—focuses first on reading. Moreover, the school curriculum at various levels in EFL settings has also indicated the priority of cultivating students' reading ability. This can be shown in the fact that the intensive reading (IR) and extensive reading (ER) courses (Note 1) have more hours devoted each week to reading than to listening in Chinese tertiary classrooms. Based on the reality of the teaching circumstances, I proposed two hypotheses when conducting this study: (1) students' high proficiency in reading would result in a high proficiency in writing skills; and (2) students' high proficiency in reading would result in a high proficiency in listening skills. The purpose of the current study,

therefore, was to examine and explore the relationships between reading, writing, and listening skills, as indicated by students' performance on the nationwide standardized English proficiency test.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 Participants

The participants selected for this study consisted of 57 sophomores from a Chinese university situated in the large north-western city of Xi'an. These full-time undergraduate non-English-major students are all homogenous Chinese, majoring in computer application in the computer science department. Their age ranged from 19 to 21. As well, they started their tertiary EFL learning in the fall of 2000 and were observed during the fall term of 2001 when they were studying English at Band 3 (the third term). They expected to complete language studies after two years and four bands (Note 2) before taking the nationwide language proficiency test—the College English Test Band 4 (CET-4) to be held in June 2002.

The sample was chosen from approximately 3,000 students of the Year 2000 student population. Though simply a convenience sample, the rationale underlying the purposeful selection of such a sample was that the subjects were drawn from a comparatively large class of 57 students. Usually class sizes varied from 30 to 45 students in a "natural class" (Note 3) in the English language courses in this university.

### 2.2 Instrument

The instrument used in this study was the paper-and-pencil-based College English Test Band 4 (CET-4) of June 2000 developed by the College English Band 4/6 Examination Committee, which has been operational since 1987. CET-4 measures the following items: (1) Listening comprehension (20%) (10 short conversations and 3 short passages with 20 multiple-choice questions), (2) Reading comprehension (40%) (4 passages with 20 multiple-choice questions), (3) Vocabulary and structure (15%) (30 multiple-choice questions with 60% on vocabulary and 40% on structure), (4) Cloze test (10%) (20 multiple-choice questions), and (5) Writing (15%) (one page composition of 120 to 150 words on a given topic to be finished within 30 minutes). This nationwide test mainly employs an objective multiple-choice format (90 questions altogether), which requires an individual to choose correctly from four possible answers to each question.

Yang (2001) reported from his studies that the CET-4/6 have shown high reliability and validity. From the questionnaires obtained, 92% of EFL teachers in college and universities across the country believe that the CET-4/6 revealed the actual language proficiency of their students (Yang, 2001). In addition, the reported internal reliability coefficient of multiple-choice questions in each CET-4/6 is above .90, the correlation coefficient between students' actual test results in CET-4/6 and those of what teachers predict is as high as .70, and the correlation coefficient between the set passing grade of CET-4/6 and that which teachers predict regarding their students is as high as .82 (Yang, 2001). Based on the fact that each year 2.4 million students at tertiary EFL classrooms are involved in language learning and testing, these results obtained from large-scale standardized tests have indicated significant correlations.

### 2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

During a class session in December 2001, all the 57 students were administered the CET-4 of June 2000 in the language lab. This 2-hour test started with part I, listening comprehension, to be completed within 20 minutes, then reading (35 minutes), vocabulary and structure (20 minutes), and finally cloze test (15 minutes). After the spectrum sheets of multiple-choice questions were collected, all the students were required to write a composition of 120-150 words on a given topic within the last 30 minutes. Finally, all the test papers were collected by the instructor to be marked. Multiple-choice questions are marked by a spectrum machine, whereas composition was marked by the instructor according to the scoring standard set by the College English Band 4/6 Examination Committee. These scores were recorded and entered into an SPSS file as a basis for later data analysis.

After the scores from each section of the CET-4 were obtained from each individual out of the sample of 57, each score as a variable representing listening, reading, vocabulary and structure, cloze, or writing was entered into an SPSS file. Two steps of analyses were undertaken. First, descriptive statistics including mean, standard deviation, median, mode, skewness, and kurtosis for each variable of listening, reading, vocabulary, cloze, and writing were collated to better understand the raw data. Secondly, three pairs of scores were then compared for their correlations, and these were: reading and writing, reading and listening, and listening and writing. The resulting correlation coefficients indicated the degree of relationship between the variables.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Descriptive Statistics for Each Variable

The distribution for the five variables of listening (20%), reading (40%), vocabulary and structure (15%), cloze (10%), and writing (15%) were first examined. The means of the five variables ranged from 5.23 (writing) to 19.19 (reading), and the standard deviations (SD) from 1.25 to 4.47 (see Table 1). The median scores of the five variables were 10, 18, 8,

5.5, and 5; the mode scores were 9, 18, 8.5, 6, and 5, respectively. All the skewness and kurtosis values ranged between +1 and -1, and they were also within the accepted limits ( $\pm 2$ ), suggesting that the responses for each variable were distributed normally.

### 3.2 Correlations between Listening, Reading, and Writing

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated and presented in Table 2 for the measures of all the five variables. Statistical analysis revealed that there was no significant relationship between reading and listening ( $r = .053, p > .05$ ), and the resultant correlation coefficient between reading and writing was low and not statistically significant ( $r = .021, p > .05$ ). However, there was a significant relationship between listening and writing ( $r = .423, p < .01$ ). The data suggested that students' reading skills were not related to writing and listening, but that students' listening was related to their writing.

## 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The study as represented by the correlation coefficients .021 (between reading and writing) and .053 (between reading and listening) does not agree with the research hypotheses that there was positive correlation between students' reading and writing, and between reading and listening. Such results suggest that students' high proficiency in reading skills is not necessarily an indicator that they tend to be good at listening and writing.

The descriptive results in the current study tend to be associated with the following factors. Firstly, the sample is a convenience sample of 57 students in the EFL course from a university located in the large Chinese city of Xi'an. Since the sample is not selected randomly from the population and is drawn from an average university in the inland area of China, where students' English language proficiency is lower in comparison with top students from top universities, such results may not be generalized beyond the specific sample of the study. Secondly, for several years, educators and researchers in foreign language teaching and learning have hypothesized that to a large extent, successful and unsuccessful L2 learning can be explained by students' levels of motivation and attitudes regarding L2 learning (Gardner, 1985, 1990; Oxford & Shearin, 1994). Compared to students who major in law, accounting, international business, and international finance and marketing, and who may have the opportunity to work in joint-ventures which require oral and written communication in English, this sample of homogeneous computer science students may not be highly motivated toward putting much effort into the cultivation of listening and writing skills, based on the simple fact that most of them may not expect to use these two English language skills in their later careers.

The results also show that lack of variability in standard deviation tends to lower the correlation between reading and writing and between reading and listening. With reading comprising 40% of the total test score, listening 20%, and writing 15%, the standard deviation for reading, listening, and writing are 4.47, 2.89, and 1.25, respectively. There are two possible reasons which may explain this low variability. One is that the sample is a homogeneous group. Usually, the more heterogeneous the sample is, the greater the variability is. The other reason lies in the fact that there is only one rater involved in marking the written compositions. The test scores indicated that the rater was inclined to give most of her students a mean score of 5 points, hence low variability. The statistically significant correlation between listening and writing ( $r = .423, p < .01$ ) suggests that since these two sub-test scores have close standard deviation, chances are that they might have low or intermediate correlation. However, it does not necessarily imply that students who have strong listening skills write well, or that students who have low listening scores write poorly.

The lack of a clear relationship between reading, listening, and writing in the current study seems to indicate the outcomes of the "eclectic" or "composite" (Cowan *et al.*, 1979) teaching methodology employed in Chinese EFL tertiary classrooms. Since the College English Teaching Syllabus (College English Curriculum Revision Team, 1986, 1999) does not require a specific teaching method to be employed in classrooms, language practitioners can employ any teaching method they prefer, from grammar-translation approach, to audiolingual, to communicative approach. As a result, those who put more emphasis on grammar teaching would be more likely to produce students with strong reading ability but weak listening and writing skills with the overall result being that students' language skills may develop unevenly.

Finally, the current findings of the study suggest that further study involving a bigger sample from a more heterogeneous group from different universities and different departments should be conducted to test the research hypothesis. This research also lends support for the advocated beliefs in contemporary second or foreign language education that language is for communication and that language is best learned and taught through interaction. Therefore, teachers and students should be expected to collaborate both in and outside of classrooms, with a view toward creating a rich language learning environment where different skills can be developed and competence in communications can be nurtured.

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### Notes

Note 1. The intensive reading (IR) course is two hours per week, with the focus on grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing, and is taught through a written text. The extensive reading (ER) course is two hours per week with the focus on different reading skills.

Note 2. English language learning at the Chinese tertiary level is divided into four bands according to the College English Teaching Syllabus, implemented in 1986. One term is called one band. Students are required to complete four bands, for a total of 280 teaching hours (70 hours each term, six hours each week) to fulfill the basic requirements.

Note 3. "Natural class" refers to a class of students who are all admitted in the same year through the Chinese national university entrance examinations with a major in the same field of study such as chemical engineering, history, economic management, etc. and are therefore placed into the same language class.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Each Variable (N = 57)

Variables	Mean	SD	Median	Mode	Skewness	Kurtosis
Listening	10.32	2.89	10	9	-.08	-.99
Reading	19.19	4.47	18	18	.33	-.19
Vocabulary	7.82	1.53	8	8.5	-.53	.28
Cloze	5.33	1.26	5.5	6	-.11	1.58
Writing	5.23	1.25	5	5	-1.13	2.86

Table 2. Correlations between Reading, Listening, and Writing (N = 57)

Variables	Listening	Reading	Vocabulary	Cloze	Writing
Listening					
Reading	0.053				
Vocabulary	-0.024	0.107			
Cloze	0.258	0.239	0.126		
Writing	0.423**	0.021	0.054	0.194	

\*\*  $p < .01$ .



## Continuous Enrolment: Heresies, Headaches and Heartaches

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### Abstract

In this paper I report on a research project designed to address the question of how the policy of continuous enrolment has been working in practice in the AMEP (Adult Migrant English Program), the national English language program offered to newly-arrived migrants to Australia. Managers, teachers and learners from around Australia were interviewed individually or in focus groups to ascertain their views on the policy and its management. The literature on continuous enrolment has focused almost exclusively on adult education in North America, and has generally found little positive support for the policy among teachers. The results of this study indicate that the potential benefits to students in the context of the AMEP may outweigh the considerable disruption to classes it causes. In two of the three participating centres, the students were overall very positive about starting class immediately, and many teachers also appreciated these benefits for students and were developing strategies to minimize the negative effects. Similarly, while the managers generally recognized the organizational and pedagogical headaches that the policy caused, they appreciated the flexibility it gave them to open and manage classes according to local conditions. I argue that these more sympathetic views are a product of the unique context and history of the AMEP as a nationally-supported on-arrivals program, but that positive measures are nevertheless necessary in order to address the issues caused by continuous enrolment.

**Keywords:** TESOL, Continuous enrolment, Open enrolment, Adult Migrant English Program, Program management, Settlement

### 1. Introduction

'Continuous enrollment' (Beder and Medina, 2001) or 'open enrolment' (Comings, Soricone and Santos, 2005) basically refers to the right for a student to enrol in a program without waiting for traditional semester dates. (Note 1) The introduction in 2000 of this policy into the Adult English Migrant Program (AMEP) in Australia means that providers are now required offer eligible migrants a place in the program within one month of registration, a move that has led to a re-think of enrolment patterns around the country, and attracted a lot of comment by teachers. (Note 2, Note 3) The AMEP is put out to tender and delivered by a range of providers nationally, and different centres have managed continuous enrolment in different ways. However, competition between providers has meant that information on how they do this has not always been shared freely.

Anecdotal evidence has suggested that this policy is a major challenge to managers and teachers in the AMEP, and yet there is very little research to date on its benefits and/or disadvantages or on how it can be managed successfully. Most of the scholarly research to date relates to adult education settings in North America where the policy is most often discussed in terms of student drop out and turnover, that is from the perspective of 'topping up' following student attrition, or as a means of reviving flagging enrolments (Bass, 2002: 4). This literature has, for the most part, been scathing about the impact of such policies, which are seen as a pedagogical evil driven by economic necessity largely

without benefit to either student or teacher (see, for example, Beder and Medina, 2001; Cody, Ford, and Hayward, 1998; Comings et al, 2005).

In this paper, I report on a project which investigated the views of managers, teachers and students around Australia on the policy and practice of continuous enrolment in the context of migrant education in the AMEP. I address the question of whether it is worth doing, that is, whether the benefits outweigh the disadvantages, and if so, how it can best be managed.

## 2. The Literature

As noted above, much of the research on continuous enrolment comes from the field of adult literacy in the US which has practised continuous enrolment since the 1960s. In this context, there are two main arguments in its favour. First, the ability to enrol in a class without waiting for traditional entry points is argued to offer flexibility to adult students for whom employment and family responsibilities make regular class attendance difficult (Comings et al, 2005; Robinson-Geller, forthcoming; Sticht, McDonald and Erickson, 1998). An added benefit is that, if properly handled through sensitive and inclusive enrolment management, this flexibility can shake institutions out of a complacent take-it-or-leave-it attitude towards student needs. This means that, in theory:

At its loftiest, enrolment management is about an institution's relationship with its students and when practised correctly should improve those relationships (Walker, 2000: 129).

A second argument for continuous enrolment, and cynics would argue the most persuasive, is economic, in that high attrition rates in adult education programs led to the need to top up classes on an ongoing basis in order to maintain the financial viability of programs (Bass, 2002). In addition, in higher education, flexibility in enrolment patterns can be used as a weapon in the war for the best students, with institutions using flexible enrolment plans to tempt students to their institutions and away from others, what Walker (2000) describes as the development of an 'ugly underbelly' (p.130).

However, a further argument in favour of continuous enrolment, and one of the most important for the AMEP, comes from migrant education and relates to the 'heartaches' referred to in the title. Silver (1986), reporting on the experiences of the English department of an international institute in the US offering continuous enrolment in English programs, argues that it is absolutely crucial to offer migrants access to English classes as soon as they arrive, that is, without having to wait for standard enrolment periods. Since classes offer learners access not only to language instruction but also a means of becoming more familiar with their new environment and engagement with new social networks, being able to start classes immediately helps them to become more independent and to combat the depression that may otherwise develop if they remain isolated in their new country.

These arguments notwithstanding, there is very little support in the educational literature for continuous enrolment as an educational practice in adult literacy because of the many, serious 'headaches' that it causes teachers, students and managers. Open enrolment in the US has entailed both continuous entry and flexible exit (Robinson-Geller, forthcoming), and also flexibility in attendance, so that classes are in a state of constant flux. Moreover, Bass (2002) argues, in many US adult basic education programs students are accepted into programs whatever their instructional level in order to fill vacant places. This means that classes not only experience frequent new arrivals and departures, but also have to accommodate a range of levels that are difficult to teach as a single group.

Writing in the US, Beder and Medina (2001) are highly critical of both open enrolment and mixed level classes and see these as the most serious issues to be confronted in adult literacy education. Such views are echoed also in NCSALL Reports #23 and in Comings et al (2005). Similarly, Cody et al (1998), reporting on gaps and issues in the Knox County, Tennessee adult and family literacy program, also found continuous enrolment to be a serious impediment to success.

The critiques of continuous enrolment in these contexts, therefore, relate not only to the instability of the class, but also to the concomitant mixture of abilities (Comings et al, 2005; Robinson-Geller, forthcoming; Wardell, 1991) and their effects on student progress (Comings et al, 2005). Criticisms centre on the significant interruptions caused to classes as teachers bring new students up to speed, the almost inevitable disruption to classroom climate and dynamics, as well as the headache of planning class activities for a constantly changing cohort. Beder and Medina (2001) warn that such disruptions may encourage the use of traditional methodologies rather than more innovative approaches, as a constantly changing class makes it difficult to organise group or project work. As drop-outs increase, so project work and peer coaching becomes more problematic.

The stress of having to juggle this situation leads to teacher burnout (Bass, 2002; Beder and Medina, 2001) which, in turn, can lead to student disaffection and erratic attendance (Sticht et al, 1998). While teachers can make use of students who have been in the class for longer to help 'mentor' new arrivals, there is some evidence that this may sometimes be a further cause of resentment among students (Ramirez, 2005). Critiques also highlight the difficulties that the students, themselves, experience when they join a class that has been running for some time: they may find it intimidating to

enter a class which has already covered points that they have inevitably missed out on (Cody et al, 1998). Thus the practice allowing continuous enrolment into classes seems to have little support pedagogically in the literature.

However, it should be noted that the policy of continuous enrolment into a centre may be managed at an organisational level so that it does not necessarily entail ongoing entry to already established classes: intakes can be staged so that students may enrol in a centre constantly throughout a term but not actually join a regular ongoing class until later. Beder and Medina (2001), for example, suggest the organisation of holding cohorts, that is, groups that students can join immediately until such time as the members enter a regular class. Cody et al (1998) recommend incorporating a new Learning Skills class in which new students are enrolled for up to one month before entering their regular classes, which therefore receive new enrolments only at the end of each month.

In ESL contexts, special classes can be arranged outside the regular class. A pilot program of managed enrolment in non-credit ESL in which eight week sessions were held and attendance requirements were enforced seems to have been successful both for the students and the staff in a community college in California (Ramirez, 2005). Other strategies proposed in the literature to mitigate the difficulties posed by continuous enrolment relate to good systemic organization and communications within a centre. Writing about the adult migrant context, Silver (1986), for example, argues for the careful reception, assessment and placement of new students in appropriate classes through a pre-class interview and language testing, followed-up by a system which ensures that teachers have relevant background information on students. As we shall see, similar strategies have also been used in the AMEP. These organisational measures notwithstanding, this brief review of the literature has highlighted enormous dissatisfaction with the pedagogical practice of continuous enrolment into classes.

In Australia, too, anecdotal accounts suggest that teachers find continuous arrivals into the AMEP disruptive and difficult to manage. Writing soon after the introduction of the requirement for continuous enrolment, a teacher notes the confusion and disorientation experienced by students joining an already-established class and laments the 'disjointed and disparate group' that her class became and the 'planning headache' that the policy caused (Henenberg, 2000: 7). Eight years on, we have very little current information on whether this policy is worth the disruption that it appears to bring in its wake, what stakeholders think about it and what it looks like in practice in a national migrant education program. I address these important questions in the project reported below.

### 3. The Study

The project sought to address the following research questions:

1. How is the policy of continuous enrolment managed in different centres?
2. What are the views of managers, teachers and students on continuous enrolment?
3. What strategies might assist teachers and managers to manage it successfully?

Three AMEP providers from three different states responded positively to an invitation to participate in the study. Two of the providers (A and B) were departments in larger colleges of Technical and Further Education (TAFEs), and the third I was a smaller private college dedicated to second language training. (Note 4) The views of learners, teachers and managers in the three centres were sought in focus groups and interviews arranged in each state. In each case, the groups consisted of volunteers who were approached through a liaison in the provider. In two of the three, focus groups were also arranged with students outside classes (A and C); in the third (B), the focus group occurred inside class time. The teachers were all qualified professionals with a range of experience, and their profile generally reflected that of the majority of full-time teachers in the AMEP, that is, mature, experienced and female. I met with managers individually in each centre, and conducted an additional telephone focus group with a group of managers in a remote location in one state. Additional data were also collected from a focus group of experienced managers and curriculum developers from other providers in two further states at a national AMEP conference. (Note 5)

The sample of students in the focus groups in centres A and B included learners from a range of classes, from post-beginner and intermediate (principally from levels 2 and 3 in the national curriculum CSWE, but with a few from level 1 ). (Note 6) In centre B, however, for logistical reasons the focus group took place in a single class with the teacher present at CSWE level 3 (intermediate). The focus groups were conducted primarily in English, although the more advanced students translated for their fellow students who were not able to fully express themselves in English. In one provider, centre A, this enabled lower level students to contribute their views also. A summary of the data collected is given in Figure 1:

[insert Figure 1 here]

The groups were asked for their views on continuous enrolment, whether they thought it was useful, how it is currently managed and for any alternative suggestions for the successful management of new arrivals. A guide to the questions each group was asked is given in Appendix 1. The same interviewer facilitated discussion in each case. The discussions were recorded, transcribed and analysed for themes and insights. In a second phase of the project, groups of teachers

from one provider worked with me to develop, trial and evaluate some strategies for managing continuous enrolment appropriate to their teaching context (see Yates, 2006).

In this paper I primarily address the question of whether the policy of continuous enrolment is worth doing from the perspective of the three stakeholder groups (research question 2), but in doing so I first describe briefly how the three providers managed continuous enrolment (a partial response to research question 1; see also Yates, 2006). Research question 3 is addressed briefly here and more extensively in Yates (2006).

#### **4. How continuous enrolment is managed**

Of the three providers, only the smaller, private college, Centre C, enrolled students continuously into ongoing classes (see above discussion). Students normally started within a few days of their enrolment interview, even if this was very near the end of the term. Like the centre described in Silver (1986), this continuous flow was managed by a combination of a thorough initial interview and placement assessment, together with regular communications between interviewers, managers and teachers.

As is customary in every provider, students were given an initial interview at which their circumstances, goals and current proficiency level was established. This was very thorough, and the information gathered was used to place the student into a class sensitively in the most appropriate of the wide range of classes offered. A fine-grained set of descriptors was developed each term for each class, defining not only the level but also the pace at which the class was working (that is, a kind of streaming), and this facilitated appropriate placement. As discussed below, the managers and the students seemed relatively happy with this arrangement, and despite the inevitable frustrations of constant new arrivals, many of the teachers felt that they could work with it, even though communication within the centre did not always happen as planned. However, this approach seemed to rely heavily on the fact that the centre was a small and specialised in language training: there was some evidence that it was becoming more problematic as the programs within the school, and therefore the school itself, expanded.

Centres A and B both used the concept of a holding class (Beder and Medina, 2001; Cody et al, 1998) to manage enrolments after the beginning of term. In centre A, which operates in a smaller city where the students were usually refugees and often with lower levels of education, this took the form of an orientation program in which they were introduced to the local area and were able to acclimatize to learning styles and find out about settlement issues. However, in smaller, rural campuses of the same provider, this was not organizationally feasible and students were enrolled into the regular classes throughout the term. This was seen by the managers as a positive, since it allowed them to start classes with smaller student numbers than would normally be viable and therefore ensured that some language provision was possible in a location that otherwise would have been without.

In centre B, enrolment was continuous into regular classes for the first four weeks of a ten week term and then a part-time holding class for students who already had some basic English was opened after five weeks of term. This provided a general orientation to learning until the student could join a regular class the following term. Lower level students were either put into a part-time class or counselled to see if they would be happy to study in another type of venue within the same provider. Although the structural solution to the requirement for continuous enrolment was similar to that in centre A, there did seem to be some difference in stakeholder views in the two centres, as we shall see below.

#### **5. Is Continuous Enrolment Worth Doing?**

Given the largely negative anecdotal comment on and accounts of continuous enrolment in the literature, it feels somewhat 'heretical' to conclude that, overall, it is worth the disruption it causes. However, provided that it is properly supported and managed appropriately on a number of levels, this is what the data from this study suggest. Justification for this claim comes largely from centres A and C and the conference focus group of professionals from other states. It is supported by the positive views expressed by the students at these centres, and given guarded support from those managers and teachers who have found ways of working with it.

For students, the ability to start English study as soon as possible offered a vital avenue of escape from the heartaches they were suffering as they started in a strange new country and lost touch with everything that was familiar to them. The managers generally appreciated the flexibility it gave them in organising classes. From staffroom comment, insights from other projects (for example, Wigglesworth, 2003; Yates, in press) and from the literature (Robinson-Geller, forthcoming; Beder and Medina, 2001; Comings et al, 2005; Sticht et al, 1998; Wardell, 1991), I had expected very negative responses to continuous enrolment from the teachers in this study – a litany of headaches! However, while they certainly expressed their frustrations in dealing with the policy in practice, I was surprised by the sympathy shown to the needs of the students, so that the teachers were, if not exactly zealous converts to continuous enrolment, then at least apparently reconciled to finding ways of working that accommodated it. They were more varied in their responses than the managers, and this seemed to reflect to a certain extent the culture of the centres in which they worked and their ability as individuals to cope with change.

The more negative views expressed by all three groups in centre B suggests that this culture of accommodation to continuous enrolment does not necessarily occur automatically in a centre. The fact that only a limited number of students, all from the same class with the teacher present, may help to explain why the students were less positive. However, views were collected from a range of teachers and managers, suggesting that disaffection with continuous enrolment may have been widespread in this provider, and perhaps this discontent may also have influenced how their students responded to questions about the policy. I saw less evidence in this centre of commitment to overt strategies that could mitigate the most serious negative consequences of the policy. In centres A and C, in contrast, the judicious use of a variety of strategies helped to alleviate the most deleterious effects, and the teachers' acute awareness of the benefits to students of starting to learn English as soon as possible was probably a vital ingredient in this. That is, they found that continuous enrolment into classes was disruptive and difficult to manage, but that the evident benefit to students encouraged them to devise and put into operation strategies to mitigate these disadvantages. I expand below on the challenges and the benefits of continuous enrolment raised by the participants in the study.

## 6. Critiques of continuous enrolment

Criticism of continuous enrolment focussed mostly on the entry of students into classes that had already formed, rather than to the formation of holding classes, and it was the teachers who expressed the most reservations. These often related very closely to those found in other studies and clustered around two main themes: the problems caused managing learning in a constantly changing class and the disadvantages for the students of this environment.

The teachers in all focus groups found the interruption to classes and the almost inevitable repetition of some elements of class frustrating, although they did not agree on which level of classes were more difficult to handle in this way. They generally reported finding that the continuous arrival of newcomers to their classes made it difficult to be systematic in building on previous learning in their teaching and in managing assessment tasks for the class, because some learners would be ready for a particular assessment task and others would not. This made it difficult to plan towards final outcomes:

the teachers plans and teaches the course in terms of a ten week, a discrete ten week course with a beginning, a middle and an end, and if students are coming during that course, it's sort of disruptive and the teachers find it difficult and possibly the students don't get the best, don't get an optimal learning situation either really. (BT2) (Note 7)

Some noted that when class composition is constantly changing, class dynamics and cohesion suffers, and this was a particular problem later in the term when introductions are less appropriate as an activity and assessment is more of a priority.

Sort of second, third week, when they're still not quite a group, they haven't gelled, and then there's a new one and a new one and a new one, sometimes it makes that process very hard. (CT)

There was general agreement in all groups that continuous arrivals made assessments problematic on a number of counts. Thus, although they were many different views on when new arrivals should or should not be allowed into class, there was general agreement that they were not appropriate after about week seven of a ten week term. Even some of those who did not have to accept students after the end of the fourth week of term, still felt that accepting them within the first four weeks was disruptive for both teacher and students:

it's terribly disruptive. I asked the students that you saw in my class today, before you came in, how they felt and they were quite vocal, some of them, about the fact, what they didn't like was that, and they saw it happen last term, I'm in the middle of teaching something to them, you know, a knock on the door, a student comes in a bit of paper, check the code, excuse me everybody we'd like to welcome a new student, so they didn't like the disruption, they felt that they came in to learn and it's a limited time everyday and they objected to the fact that they were constantly disruptive for about 4 weeks with students coming in, and you have to pay attention and welcome that new student, and to make them feel they fit in an introduce them to the class make them feel welcome amongst all the students, so it takes probably 5 minutes to sort all that out and they object to that. (BT3)

The teachers also reported feeling sorry for students who had to join ongoing classes and concerned that they might suffer a loss of self esteem if they were misplaced in a class or exposed to premature assessment procedures or obliged to 'repeat' the class, or find these pressures too much on top of the settlement issues they were facing:

...quite capable student who arrived when we'd just started assessments and she only appeared for two half days and never came back again. So, too hard, too hard, she wanted a lower class and yet she was very capable and was assessed accurately and was placed accurately but she got quite spooked really, by the assessment level she was faced with. (CT)

Well you're virtually saying that if they come in mid-term, unless they're exceptional students they don't progress. You know they're going to repeat that term. (CT)

Moreover, they noted that although some new arrivals fit in very well, others do not and, while it was useful to make use of same-language peers for this settling-in process, this type of support was not always beneficial for either learner.

A major factor in the negative views of the teachers in centre B seemed to be strong misgivings about the motives for the policy: they felt that that the imperative towards continuous enrolment was financially driven rather than of particular benefit for the student: 'As I say I think it's driven by external forces which are not educationally sound forces'. (BTF) As another teacher put it 'educationally, there is nothing worthwhile about continuous enrolment'. (BT5)

The learners in centre B were also less positive than those in the other centres, and reported finding the constant interruptions disruptive and the need to mentor newcomers distracting:

My opinion, I think that here it is first time I study here, after four months I arrive in Australia, and I start to study in Certificate Three and I think its normal for me, but that the problem when nearly the end of the week a new student come in. You know that they start one page for me, that slows the continuity. Yeah, disturbed. (BS1)

All the time. We have this problem because when they come the teacher should stop before, to give the new ones ((another male student voice begins to speak over)), to repeat and learn the same thing. (BS2)

In centre A, too, the learners spoke of the length of the challenge of adjusting to the class they joined, and their feelings of inadequacy and de-motivation if they perceived their classmates to be much more advanced (although some also found this motivating) or they had to stay longer in the same class than their classmates. They also worried about falling behind with assessment procedures and reported that feeling they had missed out on material already been covered sometimes caused frustrations:

I want to say one things, when I joined the class the first time, I didn't feel good because they was better than me. And like she said, everyone talk, talk, talk, and me, like I had a headache because I can't understand any more. And I was like, when I can be like them? And like I was really upset. (AS1)

Like the teachers, they regretted the disruption to the sequencing of lessons and the repetition of content that new arrivals in class caused to others, particularly if they were at a lower level of proficiency:

if the people the English is good and then the [[level]] yeah, it's okay. It suit me and I like it. But if the level it's like, they know nothing about English, so they like make the teacher come back, back a bit and that's I don't like it ... (AS1).

Some also disliked the time spent on the strategies used by the teachers to minimize these disruptions, such as introductions and being asked to mentor new students – although others liked this opportunity to be 'the expert'.

Managers noted that the policy of continuous enrolment meant constant changes in class number, nature and size, and therefore in staffing requirements; a constant need for childcare places; and unpredictable influxes of students. All this entailed a close monitoring of attendance, class sizes and staffing, and thus additional paperwork.

The managers in centre B, like the teachers, were largely critical of the policy and raised the issue of the tension between financial constraints and the most appropriate service to students:

....and in terms of our budgets and our money and our finances, we need to have continuous enrolment but practical realities of the people who are coming and need to enrol is not always a possibility or the best choice for them as learners. (BM2)

They felt that in the particular student profile in their centre, more advanced learners who were ambitious in their study goals, found continuous enrolment more disruptive. However, there was not general agreement on this issue in Centres A and C.

### **7. Benefits of continuous enrolment**

Despite these very real concerns, the students in centres A and C were very eloquent in support of being able to start English classes as soon after their arrival as possible. They described their heartaches as newly arrived migrants – often from traumatic refugee situations – and the importance of their classes in combating the extreme homesickness and isolation they felt arriving in a completely new country on the other side of the world, echoing those reported in Silver (1986) in the US. The students felt that coming to class not only offered a start on learning or improving their English and embracing their new life ahead in Australia, but also an alternative to sitting at home besieged by unpleasant memories of the past or remembering what they have lost. Their accounts of homesickness and loneliness were often very moving and persuasive:

For me this was very good because when I arrive here, in the time I was waiting for the visa I can study, I was at home. I didn't do anything, just cry and cry. So when I remember to start in the half term, the second level, so they [[talk]] me just one day, because when I came to class and I saw people from everywhere. And the teacher was very friendly, I feel so happy to get opportunity to ((voice helps out, says 'start')) you know to start English, to be with all the people in the same case of me and so I no(t) alone ... (CS).

But if he wait for a long time, maybe he can, or and that's not good. .... the moment you can arrive, you can join quickly, because, if you stay at home, you can not learn from anybody. Because you just remain at home, sleeping, doing nothing. (AS2)

Such accounts were not only advanced by humanitarian refugees from Africa who had often suffered considerable trauma, but also by people for whom the whole migration process was more straightforward, such as Europeans joining spouses.

Most students interviewed in centres A and C, had felt welcomed by the class they were joining, even if the experience had also been daunting. Because they, themselves, had once been in the same position, most were also tolerant and appreciated the opportunities that new arrivals brought for practising and recycling what has already been taught, and the efforts their teachers made to make them feel welcome. In centre C, in particular, the very sensitive placement of students within classes that were every finely graded for level and learning pace allowed newcomers not only to be incorporated into the class, but also to be seen as a positive force:

There are two characteristics that are important, that make the fact that new students are coming is not something that could be thought of as a disadvantage. The two things that we share are that we are migrants, so we, the old ones, understand the new ones and also our level of English . The person who is coming to the class has almost our same level, so he is or she is going to talk to us and we can talk to him easily, because we are going to understand, because we have the same level. Perhaps if we in the class were people with different levels of English, it could be difficult, but because of this issue I think it's easier. (CS)

'hey asking to sit with a person who help people to do....The idea is fantastic. Good. Because always for the new arrival we want them to adjust themselves to the new city, new [[country]] XX something like that. But it is fantastic. (CS)

The teachers in centres A and C also recognised these benefits for students and also saw some positive impacts on the class of continuous new arrivals: they reported sometimes welcoming the opportunity to recycle teaching and learning in a variety of contexts, and that some new arrivals had a very positive influence on the class, making it more lively or more hard-working. Like their managers (see below), they also recognized the economic benefits to their centre and they saw the danger that students, and therefore their livelihood, might go to another centre if their own could not accommodate them. Finally, as one teacher mentioned to a chorus of agreement, patterns of attendance among adult learners, especially those simultaneously settling in a new country, tend to be erratic anyway, so that fluctuating attendance tends to be a fact of life in this educational context. As one teacher joked:

I think we have continuous enrolment because they come at half past nine, ten o'clock, half past ten [[laughter]], eleven, half past eleven. That's continuous enrolment. And lots of absences as well so ... (NC).

It was evident from both the teacher and the manager focus groups, that attitudes to managing continuous enrolment within a class were related to a certain extent to the attitude (seen by managers in some centres as personality) of the teacher. Compare, for example, the teacher who appears to thrive on change and sees it as a challenge:

I don't change my lessons at all. I just welcome them into the classroom and I tend to just absorb them in. And I don't let it worry too much, because I think I'm the sort of person that thinks, I just have to cope with what comes to me and I find a way of coping. (NC)

with the teacher who finds it disrupts her sense of how learning should be sequenced:

you don't do the third conditional at the beginning of a course for certain reasons, for example, you do the first conditional (this is a silly example), before you do the third conditional, because it is harder, but if someone walks in and they are faced straight away with the third conditional, that's not a particularly good way. Educationally I don't think it [continuous enrolment] works. (BT9)

As might be expected, the managers in all groups appreciated the economic advantages in accepting students on an ongoing basis, despite the headaches caused by the need to accommodate a continuous stream of new arrivals. Continuous enrolment helped to ensure the financial viability of classes, even when commencement numbers were low, because of the possibility of new arrivals. As noted above, this was particularly useful in rural areas where there was a smaller pool of potential students to draw on, and it often meant the difference between whether or not a class could run at all. Smaller centres also appreciated this ability, and managers generally felt the necessity to enrol students immediately in order to keep up with competitors, who might be able to offer a place if they could not:

as an organization in competition with another organization, you need to be very careful if you're going to say 'sorry, we're not going to take you [[this week]] ((another voice- 'that's right!)[...] At our centre, I'm just too afraid to knock anyone back because, I mean, we need as many students as possible. (NC)

Moreover, many managers were also ex-teachers and, like their teachers, they genuinely sympathized with a student's needs to start a program straight away:

But I think you're dealing with real people, real people who are coming to you, wanting help. Are you going to turn them away? I don't think so. (NC)

### 8. Summary and discussion

Many of the criticisms of continuous enrolment expressed in the study mirror those found in the adult education settings investigated in previous studies, including:

- incorporating into the class a student who is not familiar with the work already covered;
- keeping a stable working atmosphere in a class that is constantly changing;
- managing changing personalities and needs in the class;
- managing the balance between recycling material and tackling new areas;
- managing assessment;
- monitoring the progress of individual students.

Other issues related more specifically to the context of the AMEP, and the particular administrative requirements of the program:

- predicting what level classes may be running;
- placing students in the right class level;
- dealing with attendance/absence;
- managing exits from as well as entry to classes;
- finding child care;
- completing paperwork for attendance, deferrals and progress.

However, the strength of feeling expressed by many learners that starting their English classes helps to break their isolation, and the understanding and sympathy for their situation shown by many of the teachers and managers interviewed suggests that it may be possible to overcome or at least mitigate the pain of some of these difficulties.

It is interesting to speculate on why views expressed in this study are not as universally negative as those evident in previous studies conducted in adult education in the US.

First, in the context of the AMEP, there is a focus on *beginnings* rather than *endings*, that is, continuous enrolment focuses on providing for migrants as they arrive rather than making up student drop outs, as it does in adult education in the US. This allows for a much more positive view of the policy as a proactive move to cater for learner needs as they arrive to settle in a new environment, as well as an economic measure that potentially improves the viability of classes.

Moreover, the AMEP is a national program which has been running in various forms for over 50 years and draws on a highly professionalized workforce with a very strong history of empathy with their students (Martin, 1999). This long tradition of focussing on new arrivals has fostered a deep commitment to and understanding of the needs of migrants, and so teachers are perhaps more prepared for and motivated to seek solutions to the difficulties caused by continuous enrolment.

A key factor in AMEP teachers' ability to seek and develop these solutions may be their level of professionalization. Teachers in the program are all qualified TESOL professionals, many with considerable years of service in the AMEP and a sound expertise in a range of teaching strategies. They are thus better equipped to deal with the challenges of continuous enrolment than less qualified or experienced teachers. Beder and Medina (2001), for example, in their study of 20 Adult Literacy classes in eight states of the US, found little evidence that teachers were implementing concerted strategies for dealing with continuous enrolment. Rather, they reported classes in which bored students struggled with traditional teaching approaches and in which they were joined by other students on a weekly or daily basis, often without introductions or overt attempts towards classroom socialization. The classes described by Bass (2002) had similar difficulties.

Strong teacher preparation and continued professional development, it seems, is vital if teachers are to cope with the demands of varied and changing classes (Robinson-Geller, forthcoming; Beder, Tomkins, Medina, Riccioni and Deng, 2006; Bass, 2002).

It is interesting, then, that the teachers in Centre B, who were no less qualified than those in other centres, were, however, less positive. While the managers attributed this to the profile of their students (intermediate) and their more ambitious study goals, several of the students interviewed in Centre C also had a similar profile. The interruptions that so disturbed the intermediate students from Centre B (see quotes above from students BS1 and BS2), did not have a similar effect on a student at the same level in centre C (quote beginning "hey asking to sit with a person who help people to do"). While in a study of this kind it is not possible to explore these differences fully, it may be that the

relative homogeneity of the group, made possible through the fine grading of classes in centre C, mitigated the negative effects of new arrivals. However, not all centres are able to do this at all levels.

Indeed, the way in which the centre managed the policy does not seem to explain the more negative attitudes of students in Centre B, since both Centres A and B operated a holding class system so that students did not arrive continuously into established classes. Rather, the fact that teachers and managers in this centre were also more sceptical of the benefits of continuous enrolment for students at this level suggests that perhaps centre culture may be an important factor. Teachers in Centre B seemed more disturbed than the teachers in the other centres by disruptions to the sequencing of teaching and assessment, and it may be that they had more difficulty in adjusting to changing circumstances. For example, the curriculum used in the program is competency-based rather than grammatically organized, and yet one teacher illustrated the sequencing problems she had with an example from syntax (not teaching the third conditional before the first – see quote above which starts ‘you don’t do the third conditional’).

Overall, therefore, while there seems to be sufficient evidence to suggest that it is worth finding ways to allow newly arrived migrants to start their classes as soon as possible, this view is clearly not shared by all. Although centres and teachers around Australia have developed a wide range of strategies to address issues caused by continuous enrolment, expertise in these is not necessarily shared across centres. Many of these strategies were documented in a second phase of this project. While there is no space to describe them in detail here, a summary is provided in Appendix 2, and a more extensive and contextualised version with sample activities may be found in the free downloadable resource, Yates (2006).

### 9. Concluding Remarks

Although the findings from a qualitative study of the kind reported here can only be indicative, they do provide some important insights into the goals and management of continuous enrolment in the AMEP in Australia, and thus offer insights that may be useful to other sectors and contexts. They highlight the fact that, alongside the financial drivers for continuous enrolment, there are strong humanitarian motivations and very real benefits for new arrivals. They also reinforce the conclusion of Silver (1986) that:

Open enrolment need not necessarily breed chaos, but it does require careful and thorough management.’ (Silver, 1986: 1)

While I would not want in any way to minimise the chaos that results if it is not properly handled, this study has illustrated the value of finding educationally defensible ways of successfully managing enrolments so that adult migrants can have immediate access to language programs. The stakes are high for them, and it makes sense for language programs to capitalise on the strength of their desire to make a successful and positive start in their new home.

In this endeavour, however, professional development support is clearly needed if teachers are to have the skills to deal with and maintain positive attitudes towards the constant change they are experiencing in their classes. They are in the front line of the day-to-day practice of continuous enrolment, and while this study suggests that many are finding ways of coping, it is vital that they have the resources and professional development to make it work and ward off the teacher burn-out that could be just around the corner.

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### **Appendix 1: Sample focus group questions**

#### *Focus Group questions for Managers*

How do you assign students to a class in your centre?

Describe the process and how long it takes a student to be assigned a class.

When are students permitted to join the class?

How do you make this decision?

What restrictions are there?

What is the attitude of teachers to the current policy?

What strategies do they use to accommodate new students once the class has started?

How successful are these?

Are you in favour of the policy of continuous enrolment? Why/why not? Explain any proposed alternatives. Do you think this policy affects different centres in different ways? How/why?

#### *Focus group questions for teachers*

How often do you get new students in your current class?

How do they fit in?

Do you find that you have to help them catch up?

How do you do this?

Do you use other students?

What do they think about this?

Would these answers vary for classes at different levels or for different types of students?

What do you do to help the new students settle in and catch up? Give details.

Tell me about the effect these arrivals have on the class?

Are these effects sometimes positive?

What strategies does the management use to manage continuous enrolment?

Can you suggest any others that program managers use to manage continuous enrolment?

Do you think that students can start at times which are not near the beginning of the term?

What are the advantages?

What are the disadvantages?

*Focus Group questions for students*

How long did you have to wait before you started in your class?

When did you want to start?

Did you start in your class at the beginning of a term?

If not, how did you fit into the rest of the class?

How did you feel?

Did you feel that you had missed a lot of what the other students knew?

How often do you get new students in your current class?

How do they fit in?

Do you find that you have to help them catch up?

How do you do this?

Do you enjoy doing this?

What can the teacher do to help the new students settle in and catch up?

Do you think that it is a good thing that students can start at times which are not near the beginning of the term?

What are the advantages?

What are the disadvantages?

## **Appendix 2: Some strategies for working with continuous enrolment**

### **Strategies at centre level**

#### ***Special 'holding' or 'new arrivals' classes***

##### ***Sensitive placement of new arrivals***

- in a class just under their current level
- with a buddy of a similar/ higher proficiency
- with same language background peers in the class
- according to skills, motivations, level of education etc.

##### ***Finely graded classes***

##### ***Small number of on-arrival classes***

##### ***Staged intakes at restricted times, for example:***

- only on 1 day per week, only every 2<sup>nd</sup> week etc.
- not when there is assessment
- not near end of term (for example, not in the last two weeks)
- not after 5 wks (new arrivals go to a holding class)

##### ***Short learning modules which***

##### ***Careful monitoring of new arrivals***

##### ***Information and counselling for students***

- on when they can start
- on what continuous enrolment is and why we have it
- that they should organize and see to urgent settlement issues before they start
- on most suitable class

**Handbook of relevant information**

Special information sessions for new arrivals

A buddy system in the centre or in their class

**Strategies to support teachers****Good communications with and within centres****Professional development sessions on:**

- Sharing strategies and techniques for managing continuous enrolment systematically.
- How to cope with discontinuity in learning:
  - discrete topics each class
  - getting students to work in teams
  - how to recycle materials/ structures without boring continuing students
  - how to revisit learning outcomes in creative ways which build on but do not depend on previous classes
- Ideas for bonding activities which can foster a supportive learning environment
  - welcoming and introducing activities
    - blank world map,
    - ‘Find someone who..’
  - Activities to help class bond and maintain cohesion
    - bingo
    - range of other activities (see below)
- How to manage assessment within continuous enrolment
  - use of the independent learning centre
  - use of an extra teacher one afternoon a week
  - use of breaks for assessment
- How to use tutors/ volunteers more effectively to
  - manage disparate groups
  - cope with orientation needs of new arrivals
  - revisit areas of the curriculum covered
- Systems for keeping good records and spares of materials used
- Strategies and systems for using students as buddies and mentors
- Use of bilingual support

**Notes**

Note 1. While ‘enrolment’ is the normal spelling in British and Australian English, ‘enrollment’ is more common in North America, although some authors use both. As the context of this study is Australia, the former has been used throughout except in direct quotations from sources which use the alternative spelling.

Note 2. The AMEP is funded by the Commonwealth Government and offers between 510 and 910 hours (according to individual circumstances) of free instruction in English throughout Australia to all eligible migrants arriving without functional English.

Note 3. This one month time frame is specified in contracts with the relevant Commonwealth Department and extended to 3 months if a child care place is required. It is monitored by the National ELT Accreditation Scheme (NEAS) *Standards and Criteria*, Section D, 10.1.b.

Note 4. A TAFE is similar to a community college in North America.

Note 5. The two further states are Queensland and Victoria.

Note 6. This is a competency-based curriculum, the Certificates of Spoken and Written English.

Note 7. Extracts from the data will be names according to the participant and centre from which they were collected, that is, A,B,C, student, teacher or manager (S, T, M) and with a participant number where this was discernible from

the transcript. Thus BT2 is an extract from Teacher number 2 at Centre B. Extracts from the focus groups held at the conference are labelled NC. Individual participants were not identified in these data.

Centre A	1 teacher focus group, 1 face-to face manager interview, 1 telephone manager focus group, 1 student focus group
Centre B	1 teacher focus group, 1 individual teacher interview, 1 face-to face manager focus group, a student focus group in class time
Centre C	1 teacher focus group, 1 face-to face manager interview, 2 student focus groups
National conference	Focus group of managers and senior teachers/curriculum coordinators

Figure 1. Summary of data collection



## What Can We Tell from These Temporal Measures? – Temporal Measures as Indices of Oral Proficiency

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### Abstract

Oral English teaching has long been a weak link in the science universities in China, let alone the research on oral English test by quantitative method. Therefore, OEPT in the U.S. sheds enlightening light on the spoken English teaching and researching in China. OEPT (Oral English Proficiency Test) is a spoken English test aimed to assess the oral English proficiency of prospective international teaching assistants in the U.S. In the past few years, temporal variables as indices of oral English proficiency to analyze examinees' oral speech were explored and studied at a large Mid-western American university. Based on the descriptive statistics of the selected temporal variables, this paper aims to give an interpretation of the figures obtained by OEPT data in order to get enlightening implications on spoken English teaching in China.

**Keywords:** OEPT, Silent pause time, Filled pause time, Speech time, MSR (Mean Syllables per Run), Speech rate, Articulation rate

### 1. OEPT Data

OEPT (Oral English Proficiency Test) is a spoken English test aimed to assess the oral English proficiency of prospective international teaching assistants at a large research-based North American university. The OEPT is a semi-direct test which is conducted on computer. The students' oral performance sound files are stored onto disks and rated by human raters. The test includes ten items: compare and contrast, summarize graph, newspaper headline, pass on information, read aloud, give advice, personal history, telephone message, summarize conversation 1 and 2. Each examinee is rated by two raters on a five-point ordinal scale (2 - 6). Examinees pass the test with a score of 5 or above. Those students who are below 5 are required to take a one-semester English course – English001T. The test has eight forms, across which the difficulty of the corresponding items is equivalent. The computer randomly assigns one out of the eight forms to an examinee when he/she logs on the computer.

From Aug. 1st, 2005 to July 31st, 2006, there were 408 international students taking OEPT at a large Mid-western American university, including 102 Chinese students. Among the 102 Chinese students, 7 students scored 3, 62 students scored 4, 33 scored 5 and none scored 6. The passing rate of Chinese students is 32.35%. From Aug. 1st, 2006 to July 31st, 2007, there were 435 international students taking part in OEPT, including 99 Chinese students. Among these 99 students, 6 scored 3, 65 scored 4, 28 scored 5, none scored 6. The passing rate is 28.28%. The director of OEPP (Oral English Proficiency Program) instructed her students to make a descriptive statistical analysis of the OEPT data in terms of temporal measures of fluency as indices of oral English proficiency. See Table 1.

### 2. Variables and definitions

The variable labels in Table 1 are as follows:

SP – Silent Pause Time

FP – filled Pause Time,

ST – Speech Time,

TR – Total Response Time,

MSR = Mean Syllables per Run = # Syllables/# of Runs (Runs = speech between pauses  $\geq 0.25$ ),

Speech Rate = # Syllables/Total Response Time (TR)\*60 (TR=SP+FP+ST),

Articulation Rate= # Syllables/(FP+ST) \*60

Speech rate is defined as syllables per minute, total number of syllables uttered by total length (in seconds) of speech sample multiplied by sixty. (Kormos and Denes, 2004)

Articulation rate is defined as total syllables produced in speech sample divided by total time required to produce those syllables multiplied by 60. (Cucchiari, Helmer & Boves, 2000; Kormos and Denes, 2004)

Mean Length of Run (MLR) is defined as total number of syllables /phonemes in speech sample divided by total number of run of speech. (Cucchiari, Helmer & Boves, 2000; Kormos and Denes, 2004)

Phonation time ratio is defined as total time spent speaking divided by total time to produce speech sample, ST/TR. (Cucchiari, Helmer & Boves, 2000; Kormos and Denes, 2004)

As to the definition of filled pauses, here're two definitions of them:

Definition 1: A filled pause is a conventional – though non-word – expression used to stall for time during the processing of spontaneous speech.

Definition 2: [F]illers are sounds or words that are spoken to fill up gaps in utterances

As far as pausing phenomenon is concerned, there have been many scholars who use different terms to interpret pausing phenomena from different perspectives. Kowal and O'Connell (1980) distinguish between filled and silent pauses, stating that the later are associated with “the generation of meaning or a more cognitive aspect of processing” (p.63). Similarly, Sabine and Drommel (1980) classify filled pauses within a group of labeled pauses of dissipation – pauses that are unintended by the speaker and “do not facilitate speech processing”. Hieke (1981) puts hesitation phenomena into two broad categories: stalls – which among other phenomena includes silent and filled pauses; and repairs – including false starts and repeats. Unlike Sabine and Drommel who interpret “filled pauses” as “...unintended by the speaker and do not facilitate speech processing”, Olynyk, D'Angeljan et al.(1987) distinguish between silent pauses and filled pauses but propose that the use of filled pauses may actually be a sign of the speakers' fluency and ability to avoid long periods of silence.

### 3. Analysis of the Data

#### 3.1 Silent Pause Time

From table 1, we can see that there are significant differences between fluent speakers (those who scored 5, especially who scored 6) and influent speakers (those who scored 3 or 4) in terms of temporal measures, which echo with our perception of the characteristic differences between fluency and disfluency. For example, Silent Pause Time increases as speakers vary from fluent to most influent, with native speakers of the shortest mean time of 17.21(seconds), 5.0 - 5.5 group of 21.41, 4.0 - 4.5 group of 28.10, while 3.0 - 3.5 group of the longest time, 39.24. Silent Pause Time is undoubtedly a weighty indicator of fluency.

#### 3.2 Filled Pause Time

In Table1, the figures which may be against people's expectation or common sense and on the other hand, which is worth noting, are the Filled Pause Time. Filled pause is usually considered a sign of disfluency, as Sabine and Drommel (1980) classify it as pauses that are unintended by the speaker and “do not facilitate speech processing”. However, the figures of Filled Pause Time in Table 1 show that this assumption is untrue. The filled paused time of students who scored 3.0 - 3.5 is longer – 2.77, while the filled pause time of students who scored 4.0 - 4.5 is 2.47, those scored 5.0-5.5 is 2.52. But the longest Filled Pause Time is that of native speakers. This can be explained that filled pause may be caused by at least two reasons: one is a sign of hesitation and disfluency of non-native speakers with low speaking proficiency; another is a strategy used by native speakers to avoid long period of silence, as Olynyk, D'Angeljan et al.(1987) state: “...the use of filled pauses may actually be a sign of the speakers' fluency and ability to avoid long periods of silence.” In this case, filled pauses are intended strategy which is an indication of speakers' oral skills. The Filled Pause time of students who scored 5.0 - 5.5 is a little bit higher (2.52) than those scored 4.0 - 4.5(2.47), which indicate that those who scored 5.0-5.5 are more skilled than those who scored 4.0 - 4.5 in applying the skill of filled pause. In addition, native speaker group has the largest Sd (3.32) and Max (12.18), with Min of 0.30, while on the other hand, non-native speakers have smaller Sd (2.81, 2.64, 1.74), with Min of 0. This can be explained that all native speakers know the strategy of using filled pauses in spontaneous speech but the degree of using varies greatly. Non-native speakers are more reserved in using filled pauses, some of them adopt it as a skill to avoid silence, while some of them perceive it as a sign of disfluency and never attempt to use it in spontaneous speech, still some people subconsciously use it because of hesitation or disfluency. In conclusion, filled pause is not necessarily a sign of disfluency, it can be used as a strategy to avoid long period of silence in spontaneous speech. But we need to teach students such strategy and encourage them to use appropriately in speech.

### 3.3 Speech Time and Total Response Time

From the figures of Speech Time and Total Response Time, we can see that it does not mean that the longer speech time, the longer total response time, the more fluent or better. For example, native speakers' speech time ranks third (62.34 against 59.51, 66.49, 73.02) in the comparison group and total response time ranks lowest in the comparison group (82.82 against 101.92, 97.06, 96.95). This can be explained that native speakers' speeches are more concise but rich in information or content, in other words, the speaking efficiency is high, while non-native speakers' speeches are not as effective (essential) and efficient as native speakers. There's lots of redundancy, repetition, empty or inadequate expression of ideas in their speeches.

It's reasonably easy to understand the two ratio comparisons in Table 1, SP/TR (Silent Pause Time/Total Response) and ST/TR (Speech Time/Total Response). Native speakers have the lowest ratio of SP/TR, while the most disfluent speakers have the highest SP/TR, which indicate that disfluent speakers tend to have longer silence pause time. As to ST/TR (or the phonation time ratio), fluent speakers have higher phonation time ratio than less fluent speakers. Compared with total response time, we can see clearly that, even though those who scored 3.0 - 3.5 have the longest total response time, their speech time is shortest - 59.91, therefore their ST/TR (phonation time ratio) is Low - 0.59, while native speakers, even though their total response time is shortest - 82.82, their ST/TR (Phonation time ratio) is high - 0.75. Since both native speakers and those scored 5.0 - 5.5 have the same ST/TR (Phonation time ratio), as we know there're differences between two these groups of people in terms of fluency, therefore ST/TR is not an adequate index of oral proficiency.

### 3.4 MSR, Speech Rate and Articulation Rate

Next we will continue to analyze three more important temporal measures: MSR, Speech Rate and Articulation Rate.

MSR = Mean Syllables per Run = # Syllables/# of Runs (Runs = speech between pauses  $\geq 0.25$ ),

Speech Rate = # Syllables/Total Response Time (TR)\*60 (TR=SP+FP+ST),

Articulation Rate = # Syllables/ (FP+ST) \*60

Based on the definition and the calculation formula of speech rate and articulation rate on page 2 and 3, we can see from Table 2 that, with the same speech time and filled pause time, speech rate and articulation rate differ in that the calculation of speech rate includes silent pause time while the calculation of articulation rate excludes silent pause time. Therefore speech rate is lower than articulation rate as far as each examinee is concerned. In Table 2, from the comparison of the ratio of the mean (of MSR) of native speakers versus the mean (of MSR) of non-native speakers, with the ratio of the mean of (Speech Rate) of native speakers versus that of non-native speakers, and with the ratio of the mean of (Articulation Rate) versus that of non-native speakers, we can see that MSR is a better index of oral proficiency. For example, as far as articulation rate is concerned, the mean of native speakers is 1.15 times that of group 5.0 - 5.5, 1.21 times that of group 4.0 - 4.5, 1.31 times of group 3.0 - 3.5. As far as speech rate is concerned, the mean of native speakers is 1.18 times that of group 5.0 - 5.5, 1.36 times that of group 4.0 - 4.5, 1.69 times of group 3.0 - 3.5. In contrast, as far as MSR is concerned, the mean of native speakers is 1.49 times that of group 5.0 - 5.5, 1.78 times that of group 4.0 - 4.5, 2.33 times of group 3.0 - 3.5. Why MSR is a better indicator than speech rate or articulation rate can also be explained in the following way: in his Ph. D. dissertation: *The Potential of Text - based Internet Chats for Improving ESL Oral Fluency*. Ph.D. dissertation (p107-108), Christopher Grant Blake compares two speech samples by means of speaking rate and MSR:

Speech Sample 1	Speech Sample 2
Speaking Rate=2.99	Speaking Rate=3.2
Phonation Time Ratio=0.64	Phonation Time Ratio=0.73
Articulation rate=4.63	Articulation Rate=4.34
Mean Length of Run = 7.25	Mean Length of Run = 6

Even though the second speaker has a higher speaking rate and phonation time ratio than that of the first speaker, the second speaker has a lower Mean Length of Run, which was caused by more frequent pauses that did not fall at grammatical boundaries. So we can draw conclusion that MSR is a better indicator of oral fluency than Speech Rate or Articulation Rate.

## 4. Implications

Based on the above analysis of temporal measures of fluency as indices of oral proficiency, we can get meaningful implications on Spoken English teaching. Temporal measures of Silent Pause Time, Filled Pause Time, Speech Time, Phonation Time Ratio, Mean Syllables per Run, Speech rate and Articulate Rate, etc are effective indices of oral proficiency. MSR is a better index of oral proficiency than Articulation Rate or Speech Rate. Filled pause is not necessarily a sign of disfluency; it can also be a sign of fluent speakers' strategy to avoid long periods of silence.

Therefore language teachers need to demonstrate and impart the features of spoken English and the strategies of making spontaneous speech to their students. Spoken English testing is an assessment of students' oral proficiency, and it's also a reflection of Spoken English Teaching. Based on the examinees' oral speech data and raters' comments on examinees' speech, language teachers and researchers need to find out and analyze the common problems of ESL speakers in spoken English in terms of phonetic sounds, intonation, stress, rhythm, vocabulary and syntax, especially the effective and meaningful expression of ideas. Thus, teachers need to instruct students with knowledge and skills of spoken English and train students to express rich and informative ideas in a more concise and idiomatic way. So spoken language testing need to be combined with and serve for spoken English teaching so as to enable students to improve speaking ability effectively and efficiently.

The author designed and conducted a pilot study on the spoken English teaching in China. The pilot study questionnaire (see appendix) was designed under the instruction of the author's sponsor and instructor in the large Mid-western American University. The questionnaire was directed at the science students who graduated from Chinese colleges and universities with a B.S. or a M.S. in order to get information on the English learning, especially spoken English teaching in China. Based on the data obtained in the pilot study, we can bear out the fact that spoken English teaching has long been ignored in college English teaching. Students' knowledge about English phonetics, rhythm, stress, intonation as well as the differences between written English and spoken English is very limited. They lack a systematic and regular training in spoken English. That's why we can see that the passing rate of Chinese students who took OEPT at the large Mid-western American university is 32.35% (2005.8 – 2006.8) and 28.28% (2006.8 – 2007.8). Because students lack knowledge of spoken English, for example, they don't know that "filled pause" is a feature of spoken English, the majority of Chinese students never use "filled pause"; instead, they have longer silent pause time. In contrast, native speakers use "filled pause" more often instead of "silent pause". See Table 1, the mean of "Silent Pause Time" of the native speakers is 17.21 while Chinese students are: group (3.0 - 3.5) is 39.24, group (4.0 - 4.5) is 28.10, and group (5.0 - 5.5) is 21.41. The mean of "Filled Pause Time" of the native speakers is 3.27 while Chinese speakers are: group (3.0 - 3.5) is 2.77, group (4.0 - 4.5) is 2.47, group (5.0 - 5.5) is 2.52. And also, it can be explained that because of Chinese students' lack of training in spoken English, even though their response time is longer than native speakers, their MSR (Mean Syllables per Run) is much smaller than that of native speakers. The mean of the "Total Response Time" of native speakers is 82.82 while Chinese speakers are: group (3.0 - 3.5) is 101.92, group (4.0 - 4.5) is 97.06, group (5.0 - 5.5) is 96.95. The mean of MSR of native speakers is 11.43 while Chinese speakers are: group (3.0 - 3.5) is 4.90, group (4.0 - 4.5) is 6.41, group (5.0 - 5.5) is 7.64. So we can come to the conclusion that native speakers' speeches are more informative, effective and efficient while Chinese students' speeches are wordier, recurrent and lack of essence.

In conclusion, the quantitative method of using temporal variables as indices of oral English proficiency is a meaningful and effective way to analyze examinees' oral speech. The method of temporal variables lays statistic foundation for the analysis and research on the test of oral speech. It reveals an examinee's oral proficiency in a more direct, scientific and convincing way. The data obtained by means of this method also sheds light on spoken English teaching. In the 21st century, English teaching in the science colleges and universities in China is attaching a growing importance towards spoken English. Besides written test, there is also spoken English test in the national college English test band 4 and 6. Spoken English is especially tested in TOEFL and IELTS. However, spoken English teaching has long been a weak link in the science colleges and universities in China. With spoken English getting more and more concern in China, this quantitative method of using temporal variables is going to receive growing concern in the research of oral English test in China, which will in turn reveal the problems in spoken English teaching and give directions for improvement. Therefore the researching on spoken English test needs to be launched in China now and the teaching of spoken English needs to be strengthened.

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### Appendix

A Survey on Spoken English Teaching in the Universities of Science and Engineering in Mainland China  
2007.11

Instruction:

Please answer all of the items that apply to you; if any question is not applicable, skip to the next one. Either tick the appropriate answer or fill in the blanks.

A. Demographic information:

1. Your gender:     male                       female
2. Your age:
  - 18-22                       23-26                       27-30                       above 30
3. Department: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Degree you are pursuing:
  - Undergraduate                       Master's                       Ph.D.
5. How long have you been living in the United States? \_\_\_\_\_ (years)
6. Have you ever taken the TOEFL ibt?
  - yes                       no

Have you ever taken IELTS?

- yes                       no

7. What was your score of spoken English test in TOEFL or IELTS?

Score of spoken English in TOEFL \_\_\_\_\_

Or Score of spoken English in IELTS \_\_\_\_\_

8. Which university did you graduate from in China? \_\_\_\_\_

What was your major when you pursued undergraduate degree in China? \_\_\_\_\_

B. Survey on spoken English teaching:

When you were pursuing undergraduate degree in China,

1 .Did you take Intensive English reading class? If yes, for how many semesters did you have the Intensive English reading class?

- yes     no                       1                       2                       3                       4

2. How often do you have your Intensive English reading class?

- once a week                       twice a week                       three times a week                       Not applicable

3. What was the teaching mode of your Intensive English reading class in college?

- in a traditional classroom, without a multimedia computer
- in a traditional classroom, with a multimedia computer
- autonomous learning in a computer lab, without an instructor
- autonomous learning in a computer lab, with an instructor
- other : \_\_\_\_\_

4. Did your English teacher incorporate any oral activities/ discussions in each Intensive English reading class?

yes  no

5. How long do oral activities /discussions take up in each Intensive English reading class? (Here each class refers to 2 sessions of 110 minutes)

0 mins  5-10mins  10-20 mins  20-30 mins  30-40mins

6. What was the average amount of time each student's speaking English in the Intensive English reading class?

0mins  1-3 mins  3-5 mins  5-10 mins

7. What textbook did you use for your Intensive English reading class in college? Title \_\_\_\_\_  
Publishing House \_\_\_\_\_

8. Did you take any Extensive English reading class? If yes, for how many semesters did you have the Extensive English reading class?

yes  no  1  2  3  4

9. How often do you have your Extensive English reading class?

once a week  twice a week  three times a week  Not applicable

10. Did you take any Listening and Speaking English class? If yes, for how many semesters did you have the Listening and Speaking English class?

yes  no  1  2  3  4

11. How often do you have your Listening and Speaking English class?

once a week  twice a week  three times a week  Not applicable

12. What was the teaching mode of your Listening and Speaking English class?

in a traditional classroom, without a multimedia computer

in a traditional classroom, with a multimedia computer

in a multimedia computer lab with an instructor

autonomous learning in a computer lab without an instructor

autonomous learning in a computer lab, with an instructor

other : \_\_\_\_\_

13. What was the average amount of time each student's speaking English in the Listening and Speaking English class?

0mins  1-3 mins  3-5 mins  5-10 mins

14. What textbook did you use for your Listening and Speaking English in college?

Title \_\_\_\_\_ Publishing House \_\_\_\_\_

15. Did you take Listening English class? If yes, for how many semesters did you have the Listening English class?

yes  no  1  2  3  4

16. What was the teaching mode of your Listening English class?

in a traditional classroom, without a multimedia computer

in a traditional classroom, with a multimedia computer

in a multimedia computer lab with an instructor

autonomous learning in a computer lab without an instructor

autonomous learning in a computer lab, with an instructor

other : \_\_\_\_\_

17. Did you take any Speaking English class? If yes, for how many semesters did you have the speaking English class?

yes  no  1  2  3  4

18. If you had Speaking English class when you were pursuing undergraduate degree in China, was it a required course or an elective course?

required  elective

19. What was the teaching mode of your Speaking English class?

- in a traditional classroom, without a multimedia computer
- in a traditional classroom, with a multimedia computer
- in a multimedia computer lab
- autonomous learning in a computer lab without an instructor
- autonomous learning in a computer lab, with an instructor
- other : \_\_\_\_\_

20. Where was students' speaking ability mainly developed while you were in college?

- in Speaking class
- in Intensive English reading class
- in Listening and Speaking class
- other:

21. How often do you do the following activities in your English class?

	All the time	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
Group discussion				
Pair work				
Drill and practice				
Making presentations				
Watching videotapes or DVDs				
Debate				

22. What was the degree that your Intensive English reading teacher attached importance to spoken English?

- great importance
- adequate importance
- just so-so
- no importance

23. What was the ratio of your English teacher's speaking English / speaking Chinese in your Intensive English class?

- 10:0
- 8:2
- 6:4
- 5:5
- 4:6
- 2:8
- 0:10

24. What do you think of the oral English of your English teacher who taught you Intensive English reading?

(If you had several English teachers, please make a comment on the teacher who taught you for the longest period)

- very good
- good
- just so-so
- . poor

25. Where did you learn the knowledge about English phonetic symbols?

	Yes	No
from middle school English teachers		
from college English teachers		
from books		
from videotapes or DVDs		
from family tutors		
I never learn them		
from other source		

26. How much knowledge do you know about English rhythm and stress?

- know a lot
- know some
- know just a little
- know nothing

27. Where did you learn any knowledge about English rhythm and stress? (Check all that apply)

	Yes	No
from middle school English teachers		
from college English teachers		
from books		
from videotapes or DVDs		
from family tutors		
I never learn them		
from other source		

28. Are you clear about the differences between spoken English and written English?

- know a lot       know some       know just a little       know nothing

29. Did your college English teacher point out the differences between spoken English and written English?

- yes       no

30. How influential were the following in the development of your spoken English?

	Not helpful					very helpful	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
your middle school English teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>						
your college English teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>						
native speakers	<input type="checkbox"/>						
English lectures	<input type="checkbox"/>						
Books	<input type="checkbox"/>						
videotapes/DVDs	<input type="checkbox"/>						
other source:	<input type="checkbox"/>						

31. Since you came to the U.S., how helpful were the following in improving your spoken English?

	Not helpful							very helpful						
	1.	2.	3	4	5	6	7	1.	2.	3	4	5	6	7
taking courses	<input type="checkbox"/>													
participating in class discussions	<input type="checkbox"/>													
making presentations	<input type="checkbox"/>													
participating in social / cultural activities	<input type="checkbox"/>													
going to church	<input type="checkbox"/>													
watching TV or DVDs	<input type="checkbox"/>													
other _____	<input type="checkbox"/>													

32. What textbook of English Listening and Speaking have you found most helpful?

Title \_\_\_\_\_ Publishing House \_\_\_\_\_

33. What is the degree that you attach importance to spoken English?

- great importance       adequate importance  
 just so-so       no importance

34. In your opinion, how much time of Intensive English reading class in China should be devoted to activities of speaking English?

- 2/3       1/2       1/3       1/4       0

35. Do you think it is necessary to set up a spoken English class for non-English majors in the universities of science

and engineering in mainland China?

- yes                       no

36. Do you think the English speaking ability you acquired through college English courses is sufficient for your studying abroad or not?

- yes                       no

37. Do you have any experience of text-based Internet chats in English?

- yes                       no

38. Do you think text - based Internet chats can help develop oral English fluency or not?

- yes                       no

39. Can you list any advantages and disadvantages of text-based Internet chats?

Advantages

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

Disadvantages

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

40. Did you have any experience of learning English in autonomous learning mode?

- Yes                       No

41. What do you think of learning English in autonomous learning mode?

- More effective than traditional mode of learning
- As effective as traditional mode of learning
- Not as effective as traditional mode of learning
- Autonomous learning mode should be combined with traditional mode
- No opinion

42. To develop students' oral ability, do you have any suggestions on college English teaching reforms in mainland China?

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics – Selective Temporal Variables

### Temporal measures of fluency as indices of oral English proficiency

April Ginther, Slobodanka Dimova, Jeannie Lee, Rui Yang, Xiaoju Zheng

#### Descriptive Statistics -- Selected Temporal Variables

Variable	Group	N	Mean	Sd	Min	Max
Silent Pause Time (SP)	1 (3.0-3.5)	18	39.24	11.68	15.26	58.76
	2 (4.0-4.5)	17	28.10	7.12	16.66	39.56
	3 (5.0-5.5)	15	21.41	7.31	10.45	35.24
	4 (NS)	11	17.21	6.96	6.55	28.17
Filled Pause Time (FP)	1 (3.0-3.5)	18	2.77	2.81	0	9.38
	2 (4.0-4.5)	17	2.47	2.64	0	9.52
	3 (5.0-5.5)	15	2.52	1.74	0	5.03
	4 (NS)	11	3.27	3.32	.30	12.18
Speech Time (ST)	1 (3.0-3.5)	18	59.91	12.25	34.38	80.06
	2 (4.0-4.5)	17	66.49	17.55	44.20	97.81
	3 (5.0-5.5)	15	73.02	14.88	42.18	93.54
	4 (NS)	11	62.34	20.90	29.29	90.48
Total Response (TR)	1 (3.0-3.5)	18	101.92	17.65	67.19	118.04
	2 (4.0-4.5)	17	97.06	20.16	63.74	117.35
	3 (5.0-5.5)	15	96.95	18.33	66.34	117.13
	4 (NS)	11	82.82	28.00	40.00	118.24
SPI/TR	1 (3.0-3.5)	18	.38	.08	.18	.50
	2 (4.0-4.5)	17	.29	.08	.15	.41
	3 (5.0-5.5)	15	.22	.06	.11	.33
	4 (NS)	11	.20	.04	.14	.26
ST/TR (Phonation time)	1 (3.0-3.5)	18	.59	.08	.48	.80
	2 (4.0-4.5)	17	.67	.07	.58	.84
	3 (5.0-5.5)	15	.75	.06	.63	.83
	4 (NS)	11	.75	.06	.64	.84
MSR	1 (3.0-3.5)	18	4.90	.99	3.41	6.71
	2 (4.0-4.5)	17	6.41	1.71	4.33	10.66
	3 (5.0-5.5)	15	7.64	1.31	5.22	10.08
	4 (NS)	11	11.43	2.20	7.81	14.73
Speech Rate	1 (3.0-3.5)	18	129.04	28.67	87.07	180.76
	2 (4.0-4.5)	17	159.84	24.31	110.01	215.19
	3 (5.0-5.5)	15	185.04	15.14	165.47	206.95
	4 (NS)	11	217.89	28.27	158.37	252.89
Articulation Rate	1 (3.0-3.5)	18	208.72	32.19	154.02	268.37
	2 (4.0-4.5)	17	226.57	29.37	175.54	282.37
	3 (5.0-5.5)	15	238.96	21.43	208.79	281.24
	4 (NS)	11	274.44	31.17	211.27	311.63

MSR = Mean Syllables per Run = # Syllables // # of Runs : Runs = speech between pauses  $\geq$  .25

Speech Rate = [(# syllables / Total Response Time (TR)) \* 60] : TR = (SP + FP + ST)

Articulation Rate = [(# Syllables // (FP + ST)) \* 60]

Table 2. Mean of NS/Mean of non-native speakers

Variable	Group	Mean	Mean of NS/Mean of non-native speakers
MSR	1. (3.0-3.5)	4.90	2.33
	2. (4.0-4.5)	6.41	1.78
	3. (5.0-5.5)	7.64	1.49
	4. (NS)	11.43	
Speech Rate	1. (3.0-3.5)	129.04	1.69
	2. (4.0-4.5)	159.84	1.36
	3. (5.0-5.5)	185.04	1.18
	4. (NS)	217.89	
Articulation Rate	1. (3.0-3.5)	208.72	1.31
	2. (4.0-4.5)	226.57	1.21
	3. (5.0-5.5)	238.96	1.15
	4. (NS)	274.44	



## ACCA College English Teaching Mode

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### Abstract

This paper elucidates a new college English teaching mode – “ACCA” (Autonomous Cooperative Class-teaching All-round College English Teaching Mode). Integrated theories such as autonomous learning and cooperative learning into one teaching mode, “ACCA”, which is being developed and advanced in practice as well, is the achievement of college English teaching reform, this new teaching mode will contribute a lot to the reform of college English teaching.

**Keywords:** “ACCA”, English Dormitory, Class-teaching, Autonomous Learning, Cooperative Learning

### 1. ACCA College English Teaching Mode

Base on IEDC (Interaction between English Dormitory and Class-teaching), ACCA is the further development of it. It places more emphases on the collaboration of different departments of the school, which is named all-round in this paper. Since 2001, Zhejiang Gongshang University tried to put IEDC teaching mode into use, after years of trial and experiment, IEDC turned out to be effective and successful in college English teaching, but it needs to be improved, because as IEDC developed, more departments are participated in this teaching mode, this paper is trying to illustrate why a new teaching mode is necessary and how it is working especially how to organize departments to establish and ensure its running.

ACCA college English teaching mode first attaches importance to autonomous learning, which in any circumstances is number one thing in learning and teaching. As we know, autonomous learning is a school of education which sees learners as individuals who can and should be autonomous i.e. be responsible for their own learning climate, and it helps students develop their self-consciousness, vision, practicality and freedom of discussion. These attributes serve to aid the student in his/her independent learning. In recent years, the attention and study on research of autonomous learning in China is on the rise, what a school can do first for the students to learn English is offer autonomous learning condition and produce an environment of autonomous learning.

The second element of ACCA is cooperative learning, but first of all, we need to know what cooperative learning is? Cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning. The idea is simple. Class members are organized into small groups after receiving instruction from the teacher. They then work through the assignment until all group members successfully understand and complete it. Cooperative efforts result in participants striving for mutual benefit so that all group members gain from each other's efforts (Your success benefits me and my success benefits you), recognizing that all group members share a common fate (We all sink or swim together here), knowing that one's performance is mutually caused by oneself and one's colleagues (We can not do it without you), and feeling proud and jointly celebrating when a group member is recognized for achievement (We all congratulate you on your accomplishment!). In cooperative learning situations there is a positive interdependence among students' goal attainments; students perceive that they can reach their learning goals if and only if the other students in the learning group also reach their goals (Deutsch, 1962; Johnson & Johnson, 1989). A team member's success in creating a multi-media presentation on saving the environment, for example,

depends on both individual effort and the efforts of other group members who contribute needed knowledge, skills, and resources. No one group member will possess all of the information, skills, or resources necessary for the highest possible quality presentation. In IEDC teaching mode, every class is divided into many groups, they study together and take tests together as a group and even they share one same dormitory, that's why IEDC first named English Dorm teaching mode originally.

The second C in ACCA is Class-teaching, which is the center of this teaching mode, because assignments are all designed and given to students in classroom, and all assignments are designed according to teacher's teaching even to catch up or make up classroom teaching. Therefore class-teaching is the bridge and internal part of ACCA teaching mode. Usually it consists of four parts: checking, teaching, stimulating and assigning. It is class-teaching that directs ACCA including autonomous learning and cooperative learning and even the extended learning parts which is influenced or even carried out by other departments in a school, so in other words, class-teaching is the headquarter of this teaching mode, it gives orders, designs the learning procedure, controls the learning process, evaluates the result and grades the participants eventually.

All-round teaching mode is a metaphor, as a narrow description to this teaching mode, actually All-round teaching mode here refers to as many departments as possible is involved in a systematic learning collaborating together in order to promote one learning activity and finally achieve one simple purpose. Learning languages is never easy. Learning in most cases is not a simple learning act conducted by an individual; as a broad meaning, all-round teaching mode here refers to the autonomous management and cooperative work contributing to creating an learning atmosphere so as to promote students' learning which is rarely used in foreign language learning, but as matter of fact, it is of great importance to language learning.

## **2. The Grounds for ACCA College English Teaching Mode**

### *2.1 IEDC Paves the Way for ACCA in Application*

Interaction between English Dormitory and Class-teaching mode has been in use for years since 2001, the concrete measures or methods conducted by IEDC can be continuously employed by the new teaching mode – ACCA, and could be further strengthened in a more detailed way. That is to say, IEDC lays a solid foundation for ACCA in application.

### *2.2 The Advantages of A, C, C, and A Itself and Their Integration*

First of all scholars have already proved that autonomous learning is extremely beneficial for language learners. Autonomous learning is the first step to a foreign language learner, and everybody wants to learn and speak in a relatively stress-free environment, which can be dominated by the learner himself or herself, he or she could design what he or she would like to learn and complete in a certain amount of learning period. In other words, he or she could take full advantage of their learning environment and opportunities.

When talking about cooperative learning, we need to know students learning goals. Students' learning goals may be structured to promote cooperative, competitive, or individualistic efforts. In contrast to cooperative situations, competitive situations are ones in which students work against each other to achieve a goal that only one or a few can attain. In competition there is a negative interdependence among goal achievements; students perceive that they can obtain their goals if and only if the other students in the class fail to obtain their goals (Deutsch, 1962; Johnson & Johnson, 1989). In individualistic learning situations students work alone to accomplish goals unrelated to those of classmates and are evaluated on a criterion-referenced basis. Students' goal achievements are independent; students perceive that the achievement of their learning goals is unrelated to what other students do (Deutsch, 1962, Johnson & Johnson, 1989). The result is to focus on self-interest and personal success and ignore as irrelevant the successes and failures of others. While cooperative learning emphasizes students must work together in a group to achieve the mutual goal of learning activity and the same result through their joint efforts. To ensure cooperative learning is efficient, the first and most important element in structuring cooperative learning is positive interdependence. If there is no positive interdependence, there is no cooperation. The second basic element of cooperative learning is promotive interaction, preferably face-to-face. Students need to do real work together in which they promote each other's success by sharing resources and helping, supporting, encouraging, and applauding each other's efforts to achieve. The third basic element of cooperative learning is individual and group accountability. The purpose of cooperative learning groups is to make each member a stronger individual in his or her right. Students learn together so that they subsequently can gain greater individual competency. The fourth basic element of cooperative learning is teaching students the required interpersonal and small group skills. The fifth basic element of cooperative learning is group processing. Group processing exists when group members discuss how well they are achieving their goals and maintaining effective working relationships.

Class-teaching is the joint and center of all learning activities which bridges and combines autonomous learning and cooperative learning, to be exact, class-teaching could integrate them into one, taking all advantages they possess of to attain the ultimate goal of teaching, to optimize the teaching effect.

While three-dimension refers to the autonomous teaching promotion and management and cooperative team work

between different departments of the university including teaching affair department, foreign student's office, logistics department, foreign languages department and other professional departments. How much effectiveness can be enhanced is totally up to how the all-round system working together.

### 2.3 Five Components in One Formula by UNESCO

Teaching quality = (Students + Teaching material + Teaching method + Environment) Teacher

Above is the formula in language teaching once suggested by UNESCO that is to say as for teaching quality, teacher is most important factor, but the other four factors are also significant in teaching or learning language.

As a matter of fact, ACCA pays enough attention to the five factors. For example, ACCA centers on class-teaching, which is directed by teachers based on students' learning efficiency. In classroom teaching, in order to optimize the effect of teaching and learning, teachers often try their best to stimulate students to learn teaching material, both the autonomous and cooperative learning of the individuals and groups and the autonomous and cooperative teaching management of many departments are to create an excellent learning condition, learning atmosphere and learning environment.

## 3. The Possible Problems of ACCA College English Teaching Mode in Application

### 3.1 Internal Condition

It seems that problem may arise due to any factor's change and influence quality of ACCA. ACCA needs the collaboration of departments of a school, so it definitely needs the 100% support from the school board, the devotion of the president and deans of different faculties, and the totally understanding from the teachers who will carry ACCA out in their teaching and center on ACCA to design their teaching activities thus to optimize their teaching effectiveness. To create an learning environment is not easy especially in a foreign country, most difficult of all, to build a very big mutual foreign learning area is extremely difficult to a school. Suppose at school, English area is rare, library does not quite support ACCA, and native speakers are never available, there is no English Activities such as English Speaking Contest, English teachers are not encouraged to be with students, even there is no English movies, how can ACCA work, how can students benefit from it? Just as above, among many factors, English teachers are vital part of ACCA, if English teachers do not realize enough the importance of ACCA, how can they implement it especially in class-teaching, thus affected the other factors such the teaching methods they used in class, the teaching material they employed in teaching, and their motivation to students to learn autonomously and cooperatively after class.

### 3.2 External Condition

External condition main refers to the national foreign language teaching policy and the demands of the talents speaking foreign languages. Actually this is not necessary to worry about because with the entry of WTO and the rapid economic development of China, more and more talents who can speak foreign languages are in need. The only point needs to be worried is the designation for instructors is not educators or teachers but workers of teaching. How could a group of laymen produce a sound long-term policy to a school? Worker is a technical implementer, while teacher or educator is someone who has vision and mission to humanize human being (Freire, 1984:19). Gordon (1990: 249-51) characterize school which causes problems to the teachers as follow: firstly, school considers teacher is not its partner, but a subordinate, so when there is conflict, it will be solved by power and authority; secondly, critic is not approved, as the school is always right; thirdly, school has uniformity culture and no heterogeneity; fourthly, school has no responsibility and always blames one to another. Those affect every operational activity in the teaching area including English teaching of ACCA.

## 4. Conclusion

ACCA is a systematic teaching mode, which integrates departments, groups, teachers and students of a school. The integration is to establish one same goal and to attain it with joint effort through creating a big good leaning environment. Language has five functions: "expression, information, exploration, persuasion, entertainment" (Michel, 1967:8-51). Mastering a language means capable in using it with those above functions. And since "language is primarily a social mechanism, languages are learned in social contexts", the more socialized of the learning environment, the much easier will be for learns to learn a foreign language. Only through its practice and further study, could ACCA be rapidly promoted.

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## Some Student Teachers' Conceptions of Creativity in Secondary School English

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### Abstract

This article explores a group of trainee teachers' conceptions of Creativity in Secondary School English. Data was collected by means of questionnaires and interviews. Whilst there are many promising notions of creativity, the results also reveal some evidence of narrow conceptions, inconsistent thinking and some misconceptions. This suggests that there may be significant implications for teacher trainers in universities and schools if we are to equip our students with the knowledge, understanding and skills to teach, support and facilitate creativity in their new careers. Romantic notions of original and innate genius, and a progressive emphasis on boundless, directionless play are two possible sources of misconceived ideas for training teachers of English. Creativity can be supported and developed within pedagogical frameworks and settings. This article, therefore, offers a consideration of how Sternberg's 21 suggested strategies for "Developing creativity as a decision" might be adapted and implemented in the Secondary English classroom. Practical teaching methods and competencies are presented which could be developed and incorporated into graduate trainee teacher programmes.

**Keywords:** Creativity, Trainee teachers' conceptions, Pedagogical implications.

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Creativity

Creativity is the *process* of making connections and, sometimes, is about *productivity*, about making something new from those connections (Gardner, 1993, Sternberg 1988, 2003, Newton & Newton, in press). Creating spaces where these symbiotic activities can take place is an exciting and pedagogically sound venture. Creativity is also about problem solving (Gardner, 1993, Sternberg 2003), an essential life skill which can be explored in the Secondary English classroom. Sternberg's 'investment' theory of creativity (2003) and Robinson's theory of how to promote creativity (2001) point to the complexities of the relational and human resources required when creative activity is at play. "Intellectual skills, knowledge, styles of thinking, personality, motivation and environment" all take key parts and work together to open up the space for creativity (Hall and Thomson, 2005, p.15). Creativity has an impact on self-esteem, social skills and strategies which are valuable for life-long learning (Sternberg, 2003, Craft, 2002). The effect of creative teaching and learning on children's personal development has been well documented (NACCCE, 1999; QCA 2003, 2005; SEED, 2006; Ofsted, 2006). The word 'creative' has been writ large in many educational and curriculum reforms both in the United Kingdom and abroad (see Fleming's full and comprehensive review of Arts and Creativity in Education, 2008, Le Métais' international exploration of national values and educational aims, 1997 and Hopkin's account of the Toronto Board of Education Curriculum Revision and Reorientation, 1997). This study was undertaken as a response to and in anticipation of the focus on creativity in the new curriculum which will be implemented in September 2008 in England; this curriculum has 'creative thinking' as one of its central aims. In order to train new teachers to implement creative strategies and foster creative activity in the classroom, we need first to be clear about what they consider creativity to be. Weston (2007) and Sternberg (2003) argue that creativity can be taught, learnt and developed within pedagogical settings. Both these authors offer practical guides to this effect. Drawing on Sternberg's 21 suggested strategies for "Developing creativity as a decision" (Sternberg, 2003, pp. 110 – 123), it is useful to consider which of these enter into trainees' pedagogical thought and therefore evaluate to what extent training teachers are equipped to implement these in the classroom and thus fulfill the aims of the new National Curriculum in England.

Sternberg offers general explanations alongside some specific practical illustrations of strategies which would facilitate the conditions for creative teaching and learning under the following headings:

<i>Redefine Problems,</i>	<i>Encourage Tolerance of Reward Creativity,</i>
<i>Question and Analyze Assumptions,</i>	<i>Ambiguity, Allow Mistakes,</i>
<i>Do Not Assume that Creative Ideas Sell Themselves: Sell Them,</i>	<i>Help Children Build Self-Efficacy, Take Responsibility for Both Successes and Failures,</i>
<i>Encourage Idea Generation,</i>	<i>Help Children Find What They Love to Do, Encourage Creative Collaboration,</i>
<i>Recognize That Knowledge Is a Double-Edged Sword and Act Accordingly,</i>	<i>Teach Children the Importance of Delaying Gratification, Imagine Things from Other's Points of View,</i>
<i>Encourage Children to Identify and Surmount Obstacles,</i>	<i>Role-Model Creativity, Maximize Person-Environment Fit</i>
<i>Encourage Sensible Risk-Taking,</i>	<i>Allow Time for Creative Thinking, Instruct and Assess for Creativity,</i>

(Sternberg, 2003, pp. 110 - 123).

Each of these pedagogical strategies is adaptable for specific subject areas such as English. They are also useful for categorizing into themes the conceptions which the trainees have offered in their questionnaires and interviews. Teacher trainers may then address any neglected or misconceived areas and consider how to prepare future student teachers.

### *1.2 Creativity in English*

Origins of misconception may be connected, in part, to the Romantic literary tradition and its philosophy regarding creativity and the imagination. In 1797, Samuel Taylor Coleridge famously composed his poem "Kubla Khan: Or a Vision in a Dream. A Fragment" and then published it "rather as a psychological curiosity, than on the ground of poetic merits". The poem, he claimed, came to him effortlessly, the images rising up unconsciously as he slept. When he awoke, he wrote down all that he could recollect of his vision before he was interrupted by a visitor, the rest was lost (Bloom and Trilling, 1973, pp. 254-255). This account of an extraordinary event serves well as an illustration of an attitude towards original genius, the muse and the unconscious which saturates Romantic ideas about creativity whereby the isolated artist becomes a channel for some kind of divine inspiration. This view leaves little room for the notion of fostering creativity in the English classroom. It is worth noting that a significant number of post-graduates who opt for teacher training in Secondary English in the U.K. have studied Romantic literature in some depth. A narrow or misconceived view of creativity may be a result of this ideology. Weisberg's interrogation of such myths surrounding conceptions of creativity are insightful (Weisberg, 1986, 1993). He points out that at least two versions of "Kubla Khan" exist and this suggests that the poet consciously crafted and edited the work before it was published (Weisberg, 1986, p.115).

Another pit-fall for trainees' thinking about creativity is the 'free-for-all' notions which, in the United Kingdom, were supported by progressive ideology and its effect on English teaching in the 1960s. Both Abbs (1982) and Craft (2002) offer a useful history and evaluation of teaching methodology during this period and highlight its flaws. The progressive movement, which had as its central aim child-centred, experiential, spontaneous learning, may be held partly responsible for many misconceptions which undermine the teacher's role: "It paved the way to a spurious notion of creativity, a notion which lacked reference to any cultural context, any evolving mastery of form, any adult guidance and criticism" (Abbs, 1982, p.5). However, as Fleming (2008) argues, a fair evaluation of the influences of progressive ideology would place the emphasis on child centred learning in its context as an important reform of traditional rote learning and straitjacketed prescription. What we need now is a balanced approach which aims to engage the child in enjoyable and pedagogically worthwhile activities where they will both learn from their teachers and have the freedom to explore, discover and retain ownership of their learning (Fleming, 2008, p.24).

The notion of teacher as a facilitator, rather than an expert who will intervene, guide and teach, is an issue teacher trainers in the expressive arts subjects may need to address. Children need instruction and explanation of content, form and technique if they are to use the skills necessary to think or act creatively (Craft, 2002). Also, if trainee teachers conceive of creativity as being related to critical thinking skills and problem solving (Sternberg 1999, Weisberg, 1986),

then they can perhaps begin to understand that the idea of boundaries and training in creativity is beneficial. Teachers do need to create spaces for creativity, both physical and conceptual but there needs to be structure in order for this to be successful. Boden (1996) argues that there needs to be constraints and these emerge from an understanding of the domain and knowledge of the skills needed to produce or to think something which will be valued as creative: “The dimensions of a conceptual space are the organizing principles that unify and give structure to a given domain of thinking” (Boden, 1996, p. 79). We can modulate, challenge and reframe once we understand what the frame is and of what it consists.

### *1.3 Creativity in the English Classroom*

English is vital for communicating with others in school and in the wider world, and is fundamental to learning in all curriculum subjects. In studying English, pupils develop skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing that they will need to participate in society and employment. Pupils learn to express themselves creatively and imaginatively and to communicate with others confidently and effectively.

Literature in English is rich and influential. It reflects the experiences of people from many countries and times, and contributes to our sense of cultural identity. Pupils learn to become enthusiastic and critical readers of stories, poetry and drama as well as non-fiction and media texts, gaining access to the pleasure and world of knowledge that reading offers. Looking at the patterns, structures, origins and conventions of English helps pupils understand how language works. Using this understanding, pupils can choose and adapt what they say and write in different situations, as well as appreciate and interpret the choices made by other writers and speakers.’ (QCA, 2007)

For ‘English’ read any native or additional language. In England, the new Framework for Secondary English proposes many learning objectives which relate to creativity (QCA, 2007, 2008; DfCSF, 2008). With regard to pupils’ use of style, structure, vocabulary and grammar in their writing they need to be able to apply what they have learnt about linguistic and literary techniques “accurately, creatively and appropriately to achieve impact and effect.” Pupils need to make “considered choices”, demonstrate independence and draw on “conventions and structures in order to achieve original and inventive impact and effect” (QCA, 2008; DfCSF, 2008)). Creativity is about process, problem solving and thinking skills as well as product. In this respect, reading, discussion, and drama also offer creative activity in the English classroom. Imagining alternative worlds through reading fiction can enable children to develop coping strategies for their own lives. Critical analysis, personal response to and interpretation of texts also enables children to develop their creativity. Knowledge and understanding of ethics, human empathy and citizenship can be taught and learnt through reading in English lessons. Given that empathy and critical enquiry are central to creative teaching and learning in English, we need to be sure that student teachers share this view and are able to prepare and deliver lessons where these processes can take place.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1 Context*

Teacher training practices vary from country to country. Most secondary school trainees in the United Kingdom follow a one year postgraduate programme which involves study at a university as well as teaching practice in a school placement. This study explores what ‘Creativity’ means to a group of post-graduate trainee Secondary English teachers in the North East of England. Conceptions of creativity were first investigated and identified through questionnaires at the very beginning of their one year course and before the trainees’ first school teaching placement. Semi structured interviews followed after the students had experienced four weeks of teaching English in a Secondary school. During this period they were responsible for planning and delivering lessons, assessing pupils’ work and evaluating their own performance in the classroom.

### *2.2 Participants*

There were 17 participants in the group. They were randomly selected from a larger cohort of 45 Secondary English teacher trainees. There was a range of abilities within the group which was indicated through formal assessment and participants ranged in age from 21 to 36 years. Two thirds of this group had first degrees in English Literature, the rest had degrees in Media Studies, Linguistics, English and Education Studies, English and History and Philosophy. Although there was a clear gender imbalance (2 male and 15 female), a fair reflection of the ratio of male to female trainees who opt to train to teach Secondary English at our institution, the responses did not indicate that gender was a significant factor in determining the trainees’ conceptions.

### *2.3 Questionnaire*

Briefly the questionnaire was designed to explore: conceptions of creativity in the context of the English classroom with specific examples from their experience of teaching and learning so far; what trainees considered to be evidence of creative thought / work; what would they value as being creative and why; whether they thought that encouraging creativity in English was easy or hard; what they thought the teacher’s role was; and whether they conceived of problem

solving as being related to creativity (see Appendix A).

#### 2.4 Interviews

A third of the cohort were interviewed after the trainees' first school placement which consists of four weeks of close classroom observation and then four weeks of planning for and delivering their own lessons across a range of ages and abilities in Secondary Schools in the North East of England. The interview questions were devised to elicit clarification and expansion of the categorized ideas and themes expressed in the questionnaires and the participants were able to give specific practical illustrations based on their experiences in schools.

#### 2.5 Marton's Phenomenographical analysis

The responses in the questionnaires were categorized following Marton's method of phenomenographical analysis (1981). This amounted to an iterative sort of responses into groups of conceptions under distinct headings. This process enabled further grouping of the descriptions regarding the trainee's notions of creativity into related categories. Also, the data revealed some overlap and blurring of boundaries between the categories of ideas expressed. Emerging patterns and tensions between categories were further explored in the ensuing interviews. The list of categories presented in this paper may not be complete; a larger sample could add new categories. However, those described here are able to inform discussion and reveal implications for teacher trainers. The data also points to different areas for further study in different contexts and countries.

### 3. Results

An informal examination of the responses in the questionnaires suggested that there were recurring themes in the students' expression of creativity in English. These are presented in figure 1.

<<Insert Figure 1 approx. here>>

There were many interconnections and evidence of some overlapping concepts, inconsistencies or incoherent thinking within some of the participants' questionnaires. As a response to the categories emerging from the questionnaires, the following themes were areas for further exploration in the interviews:

- Nature of English with regard to creativity drawing on specific examples from the classroom
- The relationship of creativity to the imagination
- The Teacher's role: framework, structure and intervention versus freedom, choice and autonomy
- Trainees' Concerns

Conceptions regarding individuality, self-expression, freedom and autonomy were also explored further in the interviews. Responses gathered from both the questionnaires and the interviews revealed consensus, tensions and contradictions including misconceptions and inconsistent thinking, neglected areas and trainees' concerns. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

#### 3.1 Consensus

Creativity was conflated with original thought, going beyond standard ideas and exploring beyond the obvious. The cliché "Thinking 'outside the box'" was a repeated phrase. One participant who thought that creativity was demonstrated by the ability to look at things in different ways also suggested that children are more able to do this because they are less "restrained in terms of rules" than adults. Adults become restrained as they become integrated into society but children still have the freedom to think about things in ways that are out of the ordinary. Based on her own experiences at school confidence to express one's own ideas was of central importance; she felt that it was important that children should be encouraged to express their individual ideas even if they were different to other people's without fear of being wrong:

"I would try to encourage that individuality and repeat that there isn't always a right or wrong answer, there's more than one answer. English definitely lends itself to that, to be able to express yourself and how you think as an individual because if you can't you're stuck in a box and not able to talk really."

Exploring, playing with and manipulating language to create effect was seen as part of the creative process. A majority of trainees considered creativity to be evidenced in novel products. Creative work or products would be valued if they were interesting, out-of-the-ordinary and engaging. In terms of originality and novelty one participant articulated the distinction between creativity as product and process in interview; he explained that he saw creativity as relating to process but also mainly concerned with productive activity:

"My loosely conceived idea of creativity has always involved the idea that it is something that has been produced now, in that moment, in that process. Something that wasn't there before. If it was there before then in a sense it's not creativity as a lot of people would understand it."

Self-expression and production of original texts was seen by most within this cohort as a creative opportunity offered in

English lessons. There was an emphasis on individuality and subjective response embedded within this group's conceptions of creativity in English. Creativity was associated with independent thinking: "I associate creativity with learning to think by yourself, independent thought and sometimes learning to think in quite abstract ways as well." Another example of the emphasis on individuality emerges here: "English offers a unique opportunity for students to show off their creative flair in their own original writing". This interviewee thought that students enjoy English more at university because, as regards interpretation of texts, in schools there is a "given" response that teachers or examiners are looking for. "Essentially creativity and English marry very well together because there aren't any absolute answers. That's what drew me to English, I disliked the idea that you can be absolutely right or absolutely wrong."

Using one's imagination was seen by over half the group as being synonymous with being creative: "English is a creative subject because it allows children to let their imaginations run riot in writing poetry and stories. Also reading itself develops imagination which is the root of creativity." Ideas which were contrary to notions of structure and conscious control and highlighted the close relationship between creativity and the imagination were interrogated further through the interviews. Participants were asked to explain how they saw the relationship between Creativity and the Imagination. This question stimulated different responses but each respondent saw strong links between creativity and the imagination. In one response the boundaries between the two are quite blurred:

"I always think the imagination is that extra stretch. You might have creativity there but the imagination is that extra stretch to get to expressing the creativity. Again, it's an individual thing – I do think that imagination and individuality are connected. Everybody's imagination is going to be different. The way you perceive things. You have to have a bit of imagination to be able to be creative in some way. Once you've become comfortable with the notion of creativity and the imagination maybe then you become more confident to be able to express them. To become more creative and imaginative."

One candidate thought of the imagination as being necessary for creativity but explained that she saw this relationship as "one-way":

"I see creativity in terms of creative process and something achieved at the end. Whereas, for me, imagination's more of an outlet for everything you've got going on. Imagination kind of feeds your creativity but it's that kind of one way relationship. I don't see it the other way round."

Another view attempts to make a clear distinction: "I wouldn't say that the imagination works in symbiosis with creativity because I think that sometimes imagination can draw you back in some ways. You need it to take you somewhere and sometimes imagination can be somewhat overwhelming. There are similarities between the two but sometimes the imagination can be too wayward so then you couldn't put it to good use. If used constructively imagination can push the creative limits. You need to stream it in the right way."

Another participant attempted to articulate a conceptual distinction between creativity and the imagination which related to control: "I think that creativity is probably more consciously orchestrated than imagination." This conscious (autonomously willed) orchestration of creativity was conceived of as organic rather than mechanistic.

It is not within the scope or aims of this paper to explore further these interesting and various ideas about the relationship between the imagination and creativity here since the evidence would suggest that these conceptions would not hinder trainees' ability to foster creativity in Secondary English. Writers such as Abbs (1976, 1982), Egan (1992), Harrison (1994) and Fleming and Stevens (1998, 2004) offer useful insights into the place of the imagination in English teaching.

### 3.1.1 The Teacher's Role

The main area which emerged from the responses to the questionnaires which merits further discussion is the trainees' expression of how they conceived of the role of the teacher. Eagerness and pupil participation was considered to be an outward sign of creative thought and activity. Children need to be interested in order to be creative. The teacher's role then is to entice, engage and stimulate this kind of response. In the interviews participants were invited to explain their conceptions of creativity with illustrative examples from English lessons they had observed or taught. Examples of teacher intervention included teachers modeling creativity, teaching basic skills and frameworks with which children could be creative and engaging children by offering interesting or unusual work. Four trainees conceived of English as a creative subject because of the variety of activities and texts it offers. Five trainees offered examples of creativity in English which had cross-curricular links to other subjects (Art and Music in particular). Examples of creative teaching involved cross-fertilisation, the unexpected and quick thinking in order to motivate and engage pupils. One interviewee gave the example of an unusual activity which stimulated quick-thinking; the teacher threw a football to randomly selected pupils who had to think of an adverb by the time they had caught the ball.

### 3.1.2 Relevance

Two trainees said that teachers could inspire children to be creative by making work relevant; children can be engaged

by drawing on prior knowledge, this helps them to make connections to their own lives. For one participant creative teaching is all about “offering different ways into texts or topics” which are engaging and relevant to the pupils so they can make connections to “real life”. This was illustrated with an example of a teacher who had brought in media material about serial killers to stimulate engagement with poetry about murder: “to give a different real life perspective – something real to point to. All of a sudden it wasn’t so remote and far removed and they could see what it actually meant.” Relevance was also important to another participant; she said that making texts or tasks relevant to pupils so that they could make connections to their own lives was a creative teaching method.

### 3.1.3 Valuing

The importance of valuing creative ideas is included in the teacher intervention category; three trainees wrote about this in their questionnaires. Valuing among these trainees is linked to self-esteem and confidence building. Here the need for valuing in order to create the conditions for creativity is clear: “In some cases it is hard as in Secondary at some ages pupils find it embarrassing to demonstrate creative thought. However, once one pupil suggests something which is received well this usually sparks debate.” The importance of valuing in terms of encouragement was also linked to confidence and motivation: “As soon as you say to a child ‘oh, that’s a good idea, that’s a different way of thinking’, they immediately become willing to take that further and try to think a little more.”

### 3.1.4 The Pupils’ Personality and Emotions

This data reveals trainees’ ideas about the personality traits needed in order to be creative, confidence in particular emerged as being necessary for self-expression and one trainee said that sharing ideas required trust. Confidence was also related to the question about encouraging creative thought. Two participants explained that this is hard because:

(a) “There is a certain amount of trust involved, as putting something you have created out into the world can be a traumatic experience.”

(b) “It is a confidence thing – creativity often comes from deep within and teenagers are often embarrassed to share their intimate thoughts or opinions.”

## 3.2 Contradictions and tensions

Nearly all the trainees were clear that teachers should be creative in their planning and in their manner of encouraging and supporting creative activity. However, there was a blurring of conceptions as regards intervention and facilitation.

### 3.2.1 Freedom versus Frameworks

Tensions emerge within the responses which describe or explain the teacher’s role when absolute freedom of choice and introduction of activities which do not follow rules are conceived of as examples of creative teaching in English. These trainees thought that having no constraints or barriers, no fixed or correct outcomes was desirable. Less than half the group thought that teachers should teach for creativity and that pupils need frameworks and guidance from teachers in order to use the skills required to produce valuable original work or insightful interpretations of texts. A majority of the participant trainees thought of English as a creative subject because analysis and interpretation of literature and language invites personal and individual interpretations: “Poetry is open to personal interpretation. There is rarely a set or correct ‘answer’ to poetry, so children can be creative in how they analyse it and how they choose to view it.” Here is an example of the blurring of boundaries between teacher interventions in terms of instruction and support and the notion of creativity as being boundless: “Sometimes confidence (or lack of it!) gets in the way of creative thought. Pupils are so used to being given a framework to work by but creative thought by its very nature has no boundaries. Maybe a combination of a loosely structured framework and freedom would help.”

Evidence from the interviews revealed some understanding of the need for frameworks, guidance and teaching of skills:

“I like the idea that I’m there as a tool and not for me to say ‘you have to do this, this and this. By the same token you have to understand that younger children especially don’t have the confidence to just do something. So I’ll give them a framework or guidance but then they have to be – I remember describing it as organic and allowing for room to let them express their ideas and to feel safe to express those ideas. Not that there’s one set things and they have to get the answer right or wrong or whatever”.

The idea further expanded here was that, in order to create the conditions for creativity, the teacher would need to create space for the pupils but also enclose them within a safe environment. Teacher intervention would involve sharing knowledge and understanding, inviting children to be creative but also realising that pupils need to know the skills and techniques: “They need the skills in order to be creative because if you just create space without any skills then you’re just left in a kind of no-man’s land and don’t know how to express those things in the way that you might want to.”

In her questionnaire another participant had written that pupils need self-confidence in order to express their creativity. I asked her to clarify further whether she had meant confidence in ‘self’ and to say whether or not she still held this view. Her answers provide evidence that she is now relating confidence with knowledge of skills. Evidence of a moderation

of ideas regarding teacher intervention following is clear in this instance:

“I think that at the time of writing this it was about confidence in your self. Since then and the experience I’ve had in schools, I can understand the skills side of it. If you’ve been given the tools to use, the skills, or if people have guided you how to use them, that boosts your confidence and you’ve got more understanding of what you’re doing. If you know you’re using the skills correctly and you’ve been shown that that’s acceptable then you’ve got more confidence to do that. If everyone in class is using the same skills then it’s not like you’re standing alone.”

This interviewee understood the foundational value of teaching pupils the knowledge and understanding of skills: “It builds the foundations. Then you put your own ideas in and your own little bit of creativity to build up from there.” She also saw the need for balance as regards choice and structure – pupils need “room to manoeuvre” without feeling limited. In her questionnaire she had written about giving children a free rein with no barriers and no structure. Her experience in schools had tempered that view. She had observed a teacher giving pupils a range from extracts from different writers in order to explore with them the effects of different literary techniques before they began their own original writing coursework:

“I can understand now how that can be difficult for children, not being told ‘this is what you need to do’. They need to know what good writing looks like, what techniques they can use so they can make decisions. No barriers and no structure is too much scope and that results in ‘I don’t know where to go next and I don’t know what to put in there. Without limiting they do need some guidance and support.”

### 3.2.2 Inconsistent thinking

The data collected through the interviews reveals that some of the trainees’ thinking had been modified by the experience of being in school. However, there was still evidence of narrow conceptions, misconceptions and inconsistencies within the participants’ understanding. For example, one trainee did emphasize the importance of group work and classroom display as being conducive to creative teaching and learning. However, this trainee also thought that a creative child might be “eccentric” and isolated from his peers. This participant had also linked creativity to ability in her questionnaire and she had written that creativity is “innate”. I asked her to explain further in her interview:

“I do think that there are certain individuals born with a certain amount of creativity and sometimes that can be stifled in school or sometimes it can be developed in a very creative environment. I do think that some people have it or not. You know, you’re born with it but the right sort of teaching can really develop that.”

Another trainee intelligently highlighted the distinction between creativity as process rather than product. Creativity is difficult to observe, she suggests, because “it might be the process leading up to the product, rather than the product itself which is creative.” However, this trainee also expressed her frustration that “inferences” should be taught and that pupils were expected to give “right” answers. She felt that children should be encouraged to think that, as regards interpretation of texts, there are no right or wrong answers, that their individual and personal responses are what matters most.

## 3.3 Neglected areas

It is noteworthy that only three trainees related creative activity in English to discussion, debate and collaborative work. No one wrote about physical space or the classroom environment in the questionnaires as being important for establishing the conditions for creativity. Two trainees offered conceptions which related creativity to a world view: “Creativity in English is about approaching ideas and concepts in different lights, exploring and conceptualizing them in different forms. It is about imagination and originality, not just in the creation of original pieces of work but in the way we view the world.”

### 3.3.1 Empathy

Within those answers which linked creativity to emotions and feelings, only two trainees wrote about the development of empathy in the questionnaire as being an opportunity provided within English. A promising response offered empathy through role play as an example of a creative lesson: “creating a part and thinking creatively about how someone else would feel in certain situations, thinking outside of own personal experience / ideas is creative.”

### 3.3.2 Problem Solving

Two trainees related empathy to problem solving in English lessons:

“Problem solving involves identifying the different elements of the problem and deciding on how to approach it. This involves an open and creative mind and being able to bring different concepts together to find a solution. An example of problem solving in English - analyzing a poem involves identifying the key issues, using the skills they have learnt elsewhere and bringing all their knowledge together to decide what the poem is about.”

The second trainee related problem solving to life long learning and skills needed beyond the English classroom:

“Empathy and understanding are built upon communication. Being able to express yourself fluently means you will be able to understand and be understood by others which means you are more likely to get to the position you want to be. These can be theoretical subjects in a class debate or at home when negotiating with family.”

Experiential learning was offered by two trainees as an opportunity for creativity in English in the interviews. One participant described a teaching method which helped pupils to understand the text through experiencing what the character was experiencing (empathy) - being shut in a totally dark room. Another participant also gave as an example experiential learning linked with empathy. Here the teacher was modelling creativity, she suggested, by lying curled up on the floor while the students shouted Shakespearean insults at her.

### 3.3.3 Questioning

Criticality, reflection and questioning were only brought into discussion about creativity by two trainees in interview. One participant thought that the process of creativity was about asking oneself questions about decisions and choices – providing oneself, for example, with a simultaneous rationale whilst writing or reading. This stimulates criticality which is creative. Being curious without actually needing definite answers is part of the creative process. Another participant saw creativity as being related to questioning in a reflective and critical sense. Evidence of creative thought would be questioning any: “frameworks which are prescribing a process – ‘this is how we go about it’. For me, creative thinking would involve first and foremost trying to unpack and rework some of the assumptions that are implicit in the question. I suppose that in a sense creativity is metacognitive.”

### 3.3.4 Conditions for Creativity

One interviewee gave an example of a creative classroom or environment as one where there would be “lots of different sorts of group work where pupils have to draw on things from their own experience.” A creative classroom would be colourful with lots of displays of pupils’ creative work. This would be visually stimulating and create a positive environment. The arrangement of tables would be set out for group work and that there would be flexibility so that practical spaces could be provided for drama activities. However, she considered collaborative work she had observed was successful because “the more creative ones were engaging the less creative ones and helping them to think outside the box”. “The box” as she conceived of it was “a very traditional school of thought from education, probably pre-1960s which includes rote learning, no depth or opportunities to really think.” Here is further evidence of inconsistent and muddled thinking.

### 3.4 Trainees’ concerns

Some concerns were raised by the students which had also emerged in the questionnaires about the assessment and teaching of creativity.

“My major concern is that creativity is squashed by the education system we currently have. Assessment gets in the way because students have to get a certain response. Also, “Can you actually instruct people in creativity because by trying to teach it aren’t you just squashing their own or putting yours onto them, trying to give them a rigid set of rules for being creative? It seems to be contradictory.”

Two trainees highlighted assessment procedures as being barriers to creativity in the English classroom. One participant was disappointed that his experience in schools had revealed that pupils are often unwilling to take the creative opportunities of free choices and would prefer more structured guidelines or rigidly defined titles for post-16 coursework, for example. This seemed to belie a lack of confidence due to the habitual dependency associated with earlier experiences of teaching and learning: “creativity must mean the production of something new – something original – and they seem to be wary of offering the wrong answer if they’re doing something that’s not been rehearsed in advance.”

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Limitations

First, some limitations of the study need to be emphasised. This study has offered a focused view into a small group’s ideas about creativity in English teaching and learning in the United Kingdom. If the sample had been larger additional conceptions may have emerged. While the findings may not be generalisable, there are conceptions here which other teacher trainers will recognize within their own students and this may inform how we teach others who are training to teach their native language and literature. In other words, this study has value because, in terms of ‘relatability’ (see Bassegy, 2001), trainers will perhaps find that they can relate their experiences and the conceptions of their students to these findings. On this basis, themes emerge which should form the basis for some useful discussion.

### 4.2 Conceptions and Strategies

The data reveals that many of Sternberg’s 21 suggested strategies for “Developing creativity as a decision” (Sternberg, 2003, pp. 110 – 123) have been addressed at least in part by some of the participant trainees in this group. There was

evidence that some trainees understood the value of cross-curricular work, engaging and enjoyable activities and the positive effect of teacher modelling. Sternberg's distinction between the 'big C' and 'little c' creativity (Sternberg, 1999, 2003) relates to the students' conceptions of the *teacher's role*:

"On the one hand, one cannot be creative without knowledge. Quite simply, one cannot go beyond the existing state of knowledge if one does not know what the state is. Many children have ideas that are creative with respect to themselves, but not with respect to the field because others have had the same ideas before. Those with a greater knowledge base can be creative in ways that those who are still learning about the basics of the field cannot be" (Sternberg, 2003, p.173).

Pupils and teachers need to be flexible, 'big C' Creativity unsettles frameworks but we need to have a secure grounding in our knowledge and understanding of them before we can go further. As teacher trainers it is clear that we need to foster a more pedagogically sound view which incorporates both the need for a knowledge and understanding of techniques, rules and structures whilst facilitating creative work by allowing freedom and choice where appropriate. Thus pupils will be taught and learn how to apply their knowledge of literary and linguistic techniques in English accurately, appropriately and creatively.

A key theme which emerged from the trainee's responses related to Sternberg's strategy as regards "Tolerance of Ambiguity" (Sternberg, 2003, p.115) but this was also the source of some misconceptions about the nature of English. Conceptions which related to questioning and curiosity as evidence of creativity were promising and part of the riskiness of English is due to its creative possibilities. Both original writing and interpretation of literary texts require subjective and personal responses and pupils fear they may be wrong, or exposed. Confidence building in English lessons is vital, therefore, as is an ethos of empathy and mutual support. Children have to respect one another in an effective English classroom. "Children need to be taught that uncertainty and discomfort are a part of living a creative life" (Sternberg, 2003, p.116). Some ideas are not black or white, some ideas are not immediately right or wrong and exploration of texts is at the heart of English teaching. Therefore, helping "Children Build Self-Efficacy" is part of the teacher's role: (Sternberg, 2003, p.118). However, this view must work alongside a tempering of the "anything goes" ideas expressed by some trainees. Children need to be open to teacher, peer and self evaluations which may highlight mistakes. Confidence is necessary if pupils are to thrive in a constructively critical environment; thus they will be enabled to hone and craft their creativity into valued work. There was evidence that trainees from this cohort understood that creating a climate where creativity is both encouraged and valued will build confidence and self-belief. However, there was less emphasis on the idea of valuing creative work through self, peer and teacher review. Careful textual analysis takes time and depends on a foundational knowledge and understanding of the use and effect of language in order to evaluate the author's choices and form an interpretation of meaning. Similarly, original writing can be deemed as valuable if there is a use of language drawn from knowledge and understanding of the effect and impact of literary techniques which then creates meaning, pleasure and engagement for a reader.

In response to the trainees' *concerns* we need to "Encourage Sensible Risk-taking" (Sternberg, 2003, p.114) and allow space and time wherein children can learn despite the pressures of assessment. Teaching to the test may be playing safe in the short term but this does not empower children or enable them to become independent learners. We do need to "Instruct and Assess for Creativity" (Sternberg, 2003, p. 119). A sensible method would be to implement a balanced approach. Assessment objectives need to be transparent and teaching constructively aligned. At the same time we must encourage pupils to think for themselves by allowing them the freedom to play with ideas and to take risks, in order to offer independent, thoughtful and insightful responses as long as these are justified and defensible.

#### 4.3 Pedagogical implications: Areas for development

The benefits of questioning, redefining problems and problem-solving relates to Sternberg's notion of "choice" (Sternberg, 2003, p. 110). The idea of asking oneself questions and providing a rationale for creative work is sound. The value of giving children the opportunity to recognise and reflect upon mistaken choices was not addressed by any of the trainees in this group (Sternberg, 2003, p.111). The development of this analytical skill offers pupils the chance to redefine or refine choices; this would be closely aligned with the learning objectives outlines in the new Framework for English (DfES, QCA, 2008). Weston (2007) also suggests that we reframe problems in order to see them as opportunities for autonomous or collaborative learning. Negotiating different pathways around an obstacle or side-stepping in order to think laterally, "outside the box" are useful suggestions if we are to re-evaluate our notion of a problem.

Analytical thinking, critical questioning and reflection was largely a neglected area. Helping children to decide which assumptions are worth questioning is also important. It would be a waste of time and energy to debate the whys and wherefores of our idiosyncratic grammatical rules or spellings, for example. Nevertheless, commonly held beliefs which may lead to oppression or tolerance of inequality in any form must be held up for scrutiny in the English classroom. There is pedagogical value in encouraging children to ask the right questions.

Only one trainee from this group thought about the practical conditions for creativity in terms of physical, external spaces: a flexible arrangement of tables in the classroom for group work and drama activities and using the classroom walls as a space for celebration by displaying children's creative work. This means of publication is motivating, encouraging and builds confidence. It is a powerful strategy and far more effective for creating the conditions necessary for creativity than a display of film poster or book covers. A focus on the ideal "environment" for creative teaching and learning emerges, then, as an area for further attention (Sternberg, 2003, p.122).

"Encourage Creative Collaboration" and "Imagine Things from Others' Points of View" (Sternberg, 2003, p. 121-122) are two related strategies which were largely neglected by the trainees in this cohort. Understanding how a character develops in fiction as well as entering into discussion with peers about potentially provocative subject matter will enable pupils to understand, respect and respond appropriately to others; this relates to 'empathy' in English which was addressed but only by two of the trainees. Encouraging collaborative creative work, Sternberg suggests, also provides an opportunity for children to imagine themselves in someone else's shoes (Sternberg, 2003, p. 122). Group work can be introduced in English lessons which will be difficult, challenging and perhaps frustrating; sustained collaborative and co-operative effort will create the opportunity for children to develop perseverance, patience, mutual support and encouragement. This will help to "Teach Children the Importance of Delaying Gratification" (Sternberg, 2003, p. 117). It takes time to build an argument, to ground critical analysis which rings true, to create a piece of writing or speaking which is effective and sometimes children need to reflect on unfinished work; here effort and discipline is its own reward as children learn to work steadily and step by step towards the final goal. An interim sense of achievement can be encouraged by asking children to look at how they have progressed in the short term. In English, pupils need to plan, draft, compose, review and edit their short stories or poems, for example. Children need to know that original writing is only a small percentage of inspiration and then a much larger percentage of craft and skill. Having a display of carefully finished work helps children to understand what is required for the final piece to be published. However, short term goals, interim review and constructive feedback is vital for maintaining motivation. Whilst we have looked at the benefits of quick thinking activities above, we also need to "Allow Time for Creative Thinking"; creative ideas sometimes need to be "incubated" (Sternberg, 2003, p. 119).

Another area which was not addressed by this cohort relates to the strategy of encouraging children to "Identify and Surmount Obstacles" (Sternberg, 2003, p.113). This connects to other strategies such as allowing mistakes, and taking responsibility for successes and failures (Sternberg, 2003, p. 120-121). Perseverance in the face of resistance, criticism or even hostility is an important life skill. Being creative has to be a long term project because it takes time for creative ideas to be accepted and valued; being creative often involves breaking the mould or, in Sternberg's terms "defying the crowd" (Sternberg, 2003, p.113). Children can be prepared to persevere if they are informed about possible obstacles they will encounter. They can be told stories about the sorts of resistance or obstacles met by other creative people in the field such as lack of parental support or poverty, or in extreme cases, exile.

## 5. Conclusion

To what extent these findings are context specific and would be different in other countries, cultures and languages remains to be seen and is open to study. Particularly interesting would be further studies of notions of creativity in first languages where two or more may exist side by side, as, for instance, in Canada or African countries. From within this cohort narrow ideas, inconsistent thinking and misconceptions have been revealed which will inform future teaching about creativity in Secondary School English. Notions about individuality, value and teacher intervention need to be addressed. Overly narrow conceptions of creativity need to be expanded and made more inclusive. We might also consider in future research whether inconsistent or conflicting views are evidenced in practice through observations of trainees' teaching in the classroom. Drawing on Sternberg's work might offer new dimensions to trainees' thinking about creativity in English teaching such as the importance of group work and collaborative learning, the need for perseverance, determination, hard work and the notion of creativity as process, critical thinking and its relationship to problem solving.

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### **Appendix A**

Questionnaire given to 17 trainee teachers before their first teaching practice (N.B. Spaces for responses have been omitted)

#### **Questionnaire: Conceptions of Creativity in Secondary School English**

- Do you think of English as a creative subject? Why do you think this?
- Can you give me an example of an English lesson you may have observed, participated in or taught recently which involved creativity? Which was the creative part? What was creative about it?
- Suppose you had to teach poetry in an English lesson. Are there opportunities for creativity in it? What are they? Can you explain what is creative about them?
- Suppose you had to teach punctuation in an English lesson. Are there opportunities for creativity in it? What are they? Can you explain what is creative about them?
- What would you give the lowest or no marks for?
- What would you look for as evidence of creative thought?
- Which English topics do you see as offering the best opportunities for creative thought? Put them in order with the best first.
- What makes your top choice the best?
- Do you think that encouraging creative thought in English is easy or hard? Why?
- Do you see problem solving as being related to creativity? In what way? Can you give me an example of a problem children might solve in English?
- So, in light of your responses above what would you say that creativity in English is about?
- Is there anything you want to add about creativity in English? Have I missed something out?

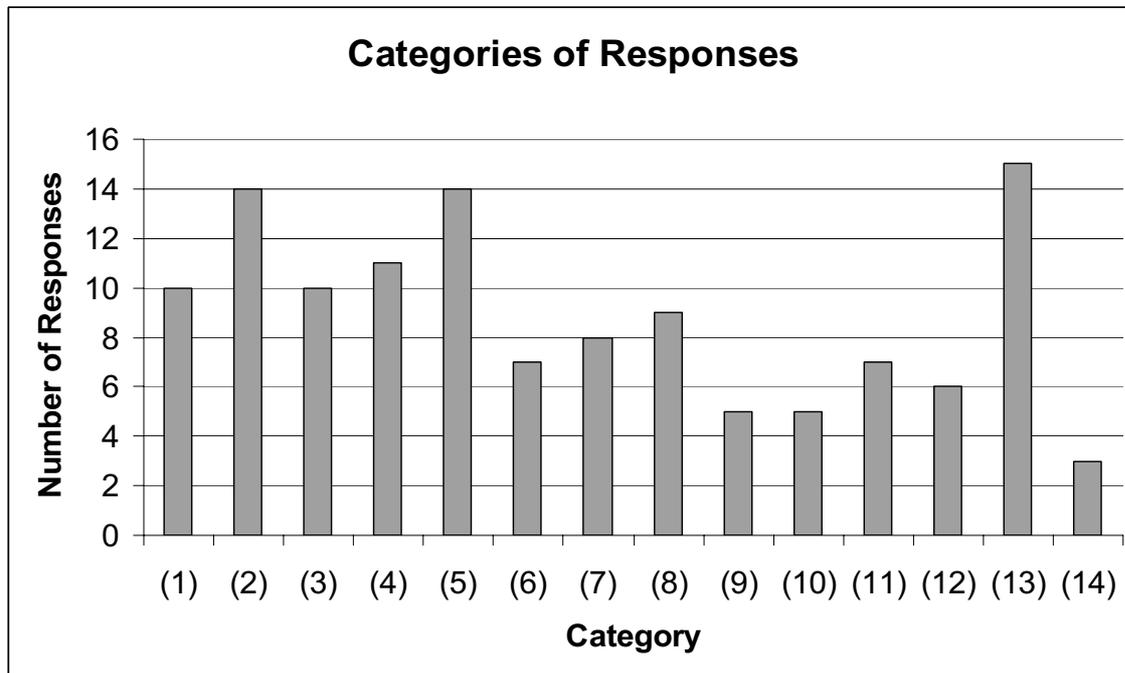


Figure 1. Categories of responses from Conceptions of Creativity Questionnaire  
(maximum possible in each category = 17).

- 1) Key:
- 2) Personal construction of meaning
- 3) Construction of a novel product
- 4) Playing with language to create effect
- 5) Using imagination
- 6) Individuality / subjectivity / self-expression
- 7) Personality traits required (confidence- 6, trust – 1)
- 8) Emotions, feelings
- 9) Original ideas, unexpected, unpredictable
- 10) Outside the box, way out, lateral or abstract thinking
- 11) Approaching things and seeing things from different points of view
- 12) Freedom of choice, no barriers or structure / frameworks
- 13) Need for frameworks / structure, teacher intervention
- 14) Need for teacher support, stimulation and facilitation
- 15) Discussion, debate, collaborative work



## A Practical English Teaching Mode of Vocational Education: Induction-Interaction Learning Community

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### Abstract

Secondary Vocational School Students are characterized by the awkward fact “congenital malnutrition” and “acquired development deficiency”, continuously adopting of the current teaching methods and modes of General Education is completely impossible. In this report, a new English Teaching Mode of Induction-Interaction Learning Community (IILC) is explored and the corresponding Teaching Evaluation System is discussed based on comparison of Teaching Mode of Lecture Method and IILC we proposed. This study shows that the Teaching Efficiency by adopting Teaching Mode of IILC is obviously improved.

**Keywords:** Vocational Education, Teaching Mode, Teaching Evaluation System

### 1. Introduction

With 30 years' rapid and extensive economic development, China's productivity is obviously improved and an era of rapid economic and technological change successfully completed. Improved productivity requires not only capital investment, but also a large work force that has the flexibility to acquire new skills for new jobs created by different structures of economic and occupations change. The level of competence of a country's skilled workers and technicians is a key determinant of labor force flexibility and productivity. Popularization of Higher Education as well as the Elite Education has contributed greatly to the unbalanced talent structure of China, thus causing many social problems. To develop the Vocational and Technical Education is the effective solution to these problems. Vocational education, which has frequently been stigmatized as an anachronistic, dead-end path for students, is becoming increasingly important and ever negligible Vocational Education returns to investment in education. Currently, attention is paid to greatly developing Vocational Education at the strategic level. The awkward situation has come to an end. Secondary Vocational School Students, however, are characterized by the awkward fact “congenital malnutrition” and “acquired development deficiency”, continuously adopting of the current teaching methods and mode of General Education is completely impossible. All of these, English teaching is the serious problem urgent to handle for their lack of interest and poor basic principles of English, which have made the English teaching difficult and complicated. Their English proficiency is significantly overestimated and the textbook is not match-able and adaptive to needs of students' physical and mental development. The real teaching aims, taking Vocational Education Center of Wushan County for example, can not complete 5% of the expected aims. What on earth they students have obtained, actually nothing after three years' English learning, is supposed to be recalled. With the rapid development of science, technology and society and the close interaction and connection of the world, the requirements of workers and technicians in knowledge and skills has largely been unregulated. Mastering of English is critical and practical, thus participating the international competitions. Cultivation of a huge work force of high-qualified and skilled is an important and urgent task in China. The problem is that Vocational Schools in response cannot complete this strategic task, of which English teaching is a bottleneck. Therefore, exploration and improvement of new teaching modes and methods should be give priority to. In this research, we proposed new teaching modes and methods. Moreover, applications and Teaching Evaluation System are discussed based on the current situation of Vocational Education Center of Wushan County in Chongqing China.

### 2. Sample

#### 2.1 Data collection

The study is based on extensive survey of the students of Vocational Education Center of Wushan County, involving a number of 1500 students, covering 8 majors including Numerical Control, Cultural Tourism, Mechanical Specialty, vehicle repair, Financial Accounting, Mechanical Electronics, Garment, Hotel and Restaurant Service and Computer Science. Seven structured questions were conducted at the participants' convenience over a two-month period. Participants were free to the answers as they wished. The seven structured questions are as follows.

1. Are you interested in English?
2. What had made you lose interest in English?
3. Do you want to learn English well if your interest is motivated?
4. What are the main obstacles of your learning English?
5. What is your real English proficiency?
6. How do you expect the teachers to teach that will make you interested in English-learning?
7. Where and when do you expect to apply English in the future and in your job?

The survey was meant to collect and reflect the true inner attitudes and problems existing in English learning of Vocational School Students, which is expected to provide some suggestions and advice in English Teaching.

After the data was collected and analyzed, we correspondingly proposed a new Teaching Mode—Induction-Interaction Learning Community. Induction-Interaction Learning Community is a system that some effective and interesting activities concerning one topic are carried on in a free and relaxed way to induce individuals' fusion into the group as a benignantly interactive learning community. The content of the lesson is major-linked, commonly perceptible. Lecture Method and mode of Induction-Interaction Learning Community were adopted to give the same lesson to 30 classes of different majors respectively. The teaching efficiency is checked by the indexes of average complete percentages of achievement of their corresponding teaching aims, degree of satisfaction and participation.

### 2.2 Data analysis

All the answers of the seven structured questions were collected and analyzed after a two month period. The statistic results display as follows (Table 1). The statistic results show that 91% of the questionnaire are not interested in English while only 9% take a slight interest. 71% of them want to learn English well. 95% of subjects regard words recitation, pronunciation and sentence translation as the main obstacles of your learning English while 5% of them responded that they are utterly ignorant about English. 67% of the total number hold that no efforts made to learn English that lead to their losing interest in English while 33% impart that they have no innateness for English learning because they had tried their best. Some reflect that nothing but several words was known, which makes up 47%. Other revealed that they can read and write some simple words and get the meanings of some simple sentences. Still some other confessed they can read and write many words, sentences and get the main ideas of some passages. And the corresponding proportions are 46%, 7% respectively. Most of the respondents hope some interesting activities tightly linked with life, profession knowledge as well as future jobs can be carried on in class and Classroom Teaching can be carried out in a relaxed way and active atmosphere. And the proportion reached as high as 91%, while the rest reported they had no ideas. 73% of them expect that they can read some materials such as newspaper, magazines, instructions and make simple conversations with foreigners. 12% of them hope they can write English poems while 10% dreamed of chatting with the foreigners freely without any difficulty.

In the survey blow (table 2.), average complete percentages of achievement (ACPA) refer to average individual complete percentages of achievement of the corresponding teaching aims in a class. For example, when the class is given by adopting Lecture Method, most of the students from all the majors could just read a few simple words. And their average percentage of achievements in their class is ACPA.

From the table, we can conclude that teaching aims of Lecture Method are over high, impractical and difficult to realize. Teaching efficiency is exceedingly poor with very low degrees of satisfaction and participation. Teaching aims of IILC is appropriate and practical to have realized. Teaching efficiency, compared with the former one, is far better with fairly high degrees of satisfaction and participation.

### 3. Induction-Interaction Learning Community

Induction-Interaction Learning Community (IILC) is an open and flexible system that some effective and interesting activities concerning one topic are carried on in a free and relaxed way to induce individuals' fusion into the group as a benignantly interactive learning community. IILC advocates compiling teaching material, formulating teaching program and constituting teaching aims autonomously according to practical situation, practical situation of different majors, needs of students' physical and mental development, the needs of social development and students' true English proficiency.

During the class, all the students feel free to move, discuss and ask questions. And there is a simple life and major-linked topic every class. They are allowed to make simple conversations and perform in groups as much as possible after demonstrations made by the teacher and their classmates. Every one can make conversations with anyone he wants. They are greatly praised by the teacher and their classmates if they engaged no matter how they performed. The teachers view all of them able and responsible and encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning and are patient enough to help them and handle any problems if they would like to reveal. Encouragement, humor and

group-alerting statements are used to keep them interested and engaged. Induction-Interaction Learning Community values what on earth you have achieved even a few simple sentences. Teaching aims are very low, practical and clear. Moreover, Induction-Interaction Learning Community values accumulation. After three years' study, their being able to make simple conversations in familiar situations and read English newspapers, magazines and articles is fundamental task and aims of English learning. While the current Lecture Method is actually formalism phenomenon. Most of them can not write a 50-word simple composition without mistakes in simplest sentences. What they obtained is drawing hooks, doing multiple choices. Despite this, many of them failed to pass. All of these make English teaching and learning of any significance.

#### 4. New Teaching Evaluation System

Teaching Evaluation System plays a guiding role in the process of students' learning. As was illustrated above, aims of English learning will never be coping with exams and doing multiple choices. Deviation of current Teaching Evaluation System leads to the malformation of the process of teaching and learning. Therefore, a scientific, reasonable and feasible Teaching Evaluation System is of great importance, which should aims at students' life-long sustainable development. Guided by the mode of Induction-Interaction Learning Community, the corresponding Teaching Evaluation System emphasize how many correct sentences you can write, how many sentences you are able to use to make conversations in different situations and how much you understand for a given passage. Teaching Evaluation System includes conversation-making in a given situation, translations, reading comprehension with essay questions and a free title composition.

#### 5. Conclusion

We have discussed the proposed Induction-Interaction Learning Community and adaptive New Teaching Evaluation System as well as high integration of superiority and reality, which make it possible that IILC can be applied in teaching and learning jobs of Secondary Vocational Schools. English teaching reform of Vocational Education School should be started up to promote the reformation and innovation of teaching methods in Vocational Education. It is important to improve students' English by fowsing on students-centered teaching, creating easy and delighting English teaching environment, strengthening the practice sector, enhancing the intercommunication ability and setting up the listening-speaking-writing English patterns. Induction-Interaction Learning Community, whose kernel is to make happiness throughout English classroom, is a good practice to fit for learning characters of Vocational Education School students. Such kind of classroom proves to be vivid and vigorous, and it can fully arouse students' enthusiasm for English learning and develop their creativity, thus greatly improving the effective teaching and learning. Mode of Induction-Interaction Learning Community is expected to be experimented, expanded and popularized for its flexibility, interaction, openness, sharing and authenticity.

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Table 1. Schematic table of investigation results of questionnaire

<b>question number</b>	<b>answers</b>	<b>percentages</b>
1	yes	91%
	no	9%
2	no efforts made	67%
	no innateness	33%
3	yes	71%
	no	29%
4	words recitation	95%
	pronunciation	95%
	translation	95%
	utterly ignorant	5%
5	utterly ignorant	47%
	weak	46%
	just-so-so	7%
6	interesting and active	39%
	free and relaxed	52%
7	reading & speaking	73%
	writing	12%
	oral speaking	10%

Table 2. Schematic table of investigation results of teaching efficiency

major	teaching mode		achievement (ACPA)	satisfaction	participation
	LC	IILC			
NUMC	-		5.3%	9.8%	8.8%
		-	30.8%	87.8%	86.3%
CULT	-		6.7%	13.4%	12.8%
		-	66.4%	92.9%	91.7%
MECH	-		4.1%	6.3%	5.8%
		-	47.2%	83.2%	82.1%
VHRP	-		2.6%	7.1%	6.9%
		-	29.6%	75.6%	73.4%
FIAC	-		9.5%	14.4%	14.1%
		-	85.9%	94.2%	93.5%
MHET	-		3.1%	5.2%	4.7%
		-	22.7%	97.1%	96.2%
GADE	-		5.4%	8.4%	8.4%
		-	72.8%	91.1%	90.9%
HOSE	-		4.9%	8.6%	8.1%
		-	44.4%	87.7%	85.3%
COMS	-		7.3%	16.2%	15.6%
		-	87.6%	97.9%	97.7%

**Abbreviations**

IILC: Induction-Interaction Learning Community LC: Lecture Method

ACPA: average complete percentages of achievement

NUMC: Numerical Control CULT: Cultural Tourism MECH: Mechanics

MECH: Mechanics VHRP: Vehicle Repair FIAC: Financial Accounting

MHET: Mechanical Electronics GADE: Garment Design

HOSE: Hotel Service COMS: Computer Science



## A Socio-Political View of English Language Teaching in the Chinese Context

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### Abstract

In spite of the urgent need for research into the socio-political contexts of the teaching and learning of English as a second/foreign language, the predominant paradigm of inquiry into EFL in the Chinese context still focuses on the functional aspects of second language education. In order to provide a critical understanding of the larger context of the hegemony of “global English,” this paper examines the teaching and learning of English in China as an integral part of the politics of the global spread of English as well as the political and ideological apparatuses of the third-world/postcolonial culture in China. Informed by Foucault’s archaeological/genealogical methods, I trace the history of English language teaching in China, from colonial contexts in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to postcolonial conditions of English language teaching at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I argue that the teaching and learning of English in a third-world/postcolonial country is never a simple transparent process with clear-cut meanings. The ambiguous legacy of English language teaching, embedded in colonial/postcolonial relations, defines and complicates the connection between local specificities and the global context of the hegemony of English.

**Keywords:** Hegemony, English language teaching, Chinese context

### 1. Introduction

In the last few decades, intellectual work in many disciplines in the social sciences and humanities, including anthropology, cultural studies, literary criticism, and most prominently, postcolonial studies, has questioned the assumed universalisms of Western thought, and has asked how they have been produced and what other possibilities they have denied in the process. More and more scholars in these fields are being called upon to perform what Said (1994) regards as the role of the intellectual, namely, “to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them)” (p. 11), and to challenge “easy formulas, or ready-made clichés, or the smooth, ever-so-accommodating confirmations of what the powerful or conventional have to say, and what they do” (p. 23). Thus, for example, if powerful speakers or groups enact or otherwise exhibit their authority in discourse, critical researchers will seek to know exactly how this is done by investigating the discursive structures and strategies involved in that process. To understand the discursive reproduction of power, the researcher will be engaged with both the production and reception of dominance. That is, she will examine the enactment, expression or legitimation of dominance in the production of discourses, on the one hand, and the functions, implications, consequences or results of such discourses, on the other.

In this paper, I will examine the socio-political contexts of the teaching and learning of English in the Chinese context. In spite of the urgent need for research into the socio-political contexts of the teaching and learning of English as a second or foreign language, most published studies on EFL in the Chinese context, including studies in contrastive rhetoric, still seem to be designed in such a way that researchers focus on rhetorical strategies, teaching methods, and other functional aspects of second language writing (Mohan & Lo, 1985; Lu, 1998; Li, 1996; Cai, 1999; Liu, 2005; You, 2003). What seems lacking from this predominant paradigm of inquiry is a perspective that the enterprise of English language teaching and learning in China is intertwined with China’s broader social and political relations with English-speaking countries, particularly Britain and the United States. To understand the penetration of English into the Chinese psyche in the last two centuries, from the first few sporadic missionary schools in the early nineteenth century to the blossoming of a constellation of English programs in various institutions in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, which usually culminate in TOEFL, IELTS, and GRE, one must investigate the teaching and learning of English as an integral part of

the politics of the global spread of English as well as the political and ideological apparatuses of the third-world/postcolonial culture in China; one must grasp and contextualize the present construction of English as a “global” language by reflecting on the earlier spreading processes and related phenomena. Such is the nature of the phenomena I am investigating - the spread of English, the teaching and learning of English, and the larger colonial/neocolonial contexts of the spread and teaching and learning of English - and these reach through many sectors and across many planes of our post-modern experience.

## 2. Frameworks for understanding the global spread of English

There are different frameworks for understanding the global expansion of English. According to Pennycook (2000), the dominant academic line in applied linguistics on the global spread of English espouses a liberal attitude. Based on a mixture of general political liberalism and a more specific academic apoliticism, a view that academic work should somehow remain objective, this approach either denies ideological implications of the global spread of English, or suggests that they are not the concern of scholars in applied linguistics. An example of this line of thinking is Crystal’s (1997) popular book *English as a Global Language*. Crystal claims that what he offers is “a detached account” of global English that attempts to resist “being interpreted as a political statement” (pp. vii –viii). He argues for support for the benefits of English as a global means of communication, and at the same time he does not deny the importance of multilingualism either.

However, such a view of celebrating universalism while maintaining difference seems problematic, as it tends to be reticent about the ideological implications of the global expansion of English. As Pennycook (2000) suggests, such a view, while appearing to maintain a stance of “scientific objectivity,” is in fact associated with a liberal ideology that favors a capitalist market-driven “freedom-of-choice” approach in interpreting human behavior – “everyone is free to do what they like with English, to use English in beneficial ways and to use other languages for other purposes” (p. 111). More significantly, the liberal approach toward the global spread of English may have origins in “colonial-celebration,” a position that “trumpets the benefits of English over other languages, suggesting that English has both intrinsic (the nature of the language) and extrinsic (the function of the language) qualities superior to other languages” (Pennycook, 2000, p. 108).

Contrary to liberal scholars like Crystal, Phillipson (1988, 2000) argues that there are significant relationships between global imperialism, in terms of economic, political, military, communicative, cultural and social imperialism, and the global spread of English. According to Phillipson (2000), the very term “the global spread of English” is problematic as it “refers to a seemingly agentless process, as though it is not people and particular interests that account for the expansion of a language” (p. 89). Furthermore, terms such as “global English” or “world English” “grossly misrepresent the reality of the communication experience of most of the world’s population” since only a small fraction of the population of most countries in the world actually speaks English (p. 89). More seriously, such terms conceal their inherent inclusionary/exclusionary function, i.e. the use of English serves the interests of some better than others. In this sense, the view of English as a universal language can be aligned with “linguicism,” which is defined by Skutnabb-Kangas as ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and non-material) between groups which are defined on the basis of language (on the basis of their mother tongue). (cited in Phillipson, 1988, p. 343)

As Phillipson (1988) suggests, while the discourse of linguicism functioned to secure the dominance of English in colonial times, liberal discursive support for the global expansion of English around the turn of the 21st century assures the continuation of the structure of linguistic inequality in the contemporary neo-colonial world, where “the ‘development’ message has been carried overseas through the medium of the ‘international’ language, English” (p. 341). There has been no significant break with colonialist linguistic practice, since English remains in the post-colonial age the key language of multinational businesses, of administration and justice, of the media, and of science and education, etc. Phillipson observes that to facilitate learning the language, and thereby promote the interests represented by English, the English as a Second/Foreign Language profession has expanded dramatically in the last few decades, both in the West and in the Third World. In Phillipson’s words, “the British empire has given way to the empire of English” (p. 342).

Compared with Crystal’s “detached” perspective on the global spread of English, Phillipson’s critical view may seem polemical and politically over-charged. It also tends to define geopolitical relationships of the world in terms of centre/periphery binary constructions, and thus runs the risk of overlooking the complexities of local manifestations that surround the global expansion of English. Nevertheless, it is a very significant analysis as it helps us not to lose sight of the real forces of imperialism, with which the global spread of English is intertwined, that are penetrating many economic, political, and cultural domains in complex ways.

Another way to view “global English” is through a Foucaultian perspective, i.e., to consider “global English” as a “discourse.” A discourse in the Foucaultian sense is not a group of signs or a stretch of text, but statements which are enacted within a social context, which are determined by that social context and which contribute to the way that social

context continues its existence. A discourse is a system of statements which provides a way of representing the knowledge about a particular topic at a particular socio-historical moment. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault (1972) proposes a new way of looking at archaeology:

If I situate archaeology among so many other, already constituted discourses, it is . . . in order to reveal, with the archive, the discursive formation, the positivities, the statements, and their conditions of formation, a specific domain. A domain that has not so far been made the object of any analysis (at least, of what is most specific and most irreducible to interpretations and formalizations about it); but a domain that has no means of guaranteeing . . . that it will remain stable and autonomous. (pp. 206-7)

It seems that Foucault's idea is to disregard the truth of statements as well as their meaning, to map out the overarching rule systems in the thinking of whole epochs. His suggestion is to track the ordered fields of knowledge, or discursive formations, which are common to the discourses of a whole epoch, without undertaking any deep interpretations of the "real" meaning of the discourses or making a commitment as to their "truth," in the sense of correspondence to reality. Later, this archaeological approach was complemented by Foucault's "genealogy," in which the origins of discourses are studied. Foucault (1978) uses the genealogical approach in extensive studies of the development of the prison system and disciplinary surveillance. Both the archaeological and the later genealogical methods are closely knitted with the issues of power/knowledge, archaeology charting the forms of discourses and genealogy studying their power-rooted origins. Archaeology provides the distance, the detached description of the discursive formations, and genealogy the engagement, the critically committed probing of the roots of social practices. To take such a perspective implies disregarding the view of discourse as a means of transparent communication, a view within which the worth of the statements of a discourse is wholly absorbed in their truth value. To analyze a discursive formation is to weigh the value of statements, a value that is not defined by their truth, that is not gauged by a secret content but which characterizes their place, their capacity for circulation and exchange, and their possibility of transformation. Thus, it is not important or possible simply to determine what is true and what is not true. But it is possible to focus on discourses which reflect attitudes and positions, and to ask the following questions: In what contexts or situations are the attitudes and positions expressed? What interests do they serve? What consequences, both discursive and material, do the dominant representations have?

Following this "archaeological/genealogical" approach, I will not examine the truth of discourses constructed in relation to English language teaching in the Chinese context, i.e., the truth of colonial constructions of English as a superior language and contemporary liberal constructions of English as a global language, but will study how certain discourses became dominant and locate them historically. I will attempt to understand "global English" in China through historicized and localized social contexts to examine how discourses related to English are embedded in colonial and neo-colonial relations, in other words, to try to explain not only why the use of English was interpreted in terms of "global" and "universal," which, in turn, conditioned the use of English, but also how this happened in China and how discourses surrounding English in the Chinese context have come into being, and continued and changed over time.

### **3. The spread of English and the discursive constructions that accompany English to China**

A great number of works on China's relations with the West in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries provide a chronicle of the rapid changes in China as a result of increasing Western influence over and penetration into China's economic and political life (e.g., Bickers, 1999; Fairbank, 1983; Barlow, 1997). Though much has been written about foreign influence on China in the last two centuries, surprisingly little attention has been given to the role of English in this influence, given the fact that English language teaching played an important part in China's semi-colonial history before the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and in China's modernization process in the last twenty-five years.

The existing writings in relation to English instruction in China, whether they are travel accounts by visiting foreigners who have taught English in China (e.g., Salzman, 1986; Theroux, 1988; Jochnowitz, 1986; Johnston, 1996; Hill, 1997; Myers, 2002), or studies by researchers in second language education (e.g., Matalene, 1985; Burnaby and Sun, 1989; Scovel, 1983; Ross, 1993; Barlow and Lowe, 1985; Xie and Derwing, 1996; You, 2003), have not paid much attention to the fact that the history of English and English language teaching in China in the past two centuries is inseparable from the broader social and political relations between China and English-speaking countries, especially Britain and the United States. As these broader relations developed and changed over time, so too did the conditionings as well as discursive constructions of English language teaching in China.

According to Donald Ford (1988) and Robert Bickers (1999), English language teaching was introduced to China in the nineteenth century in the context of growing foreign domination (see also Liu, 1999; Austin, 1986; Fairbank, 1983). Initial contacts between China and Western nations revolved around trade between the West and Chinese coastal cities of the southeast in the eighteenth century. Though the Portuguese initiated this trade, they were gradually supplanted by the British. In 1840, the British started the Opium War with China after the latter demanded that Britain stop selling opium in China. The war resulted in a humiliating defeat for China, which was forced to give up Hong Kong and open

other ports to foreign traders. From this point on, Western powers demanded that China open more of its territory to trade and allow foreigners virtually unlimited access to China. Whenever China refused to acquiesce to new demands, Western forces invaded China, heaping one defeat upon another. By the end of the nineteenth century, a scramble was underway to carve China up into foreign spheres of influence.

It was in this context of unequal relations between China and Western powers that the English language arrived in China. Along with foreign gunboats and troops came merchants, diplomats, and missionaries, each with their own agendas. But all brought to China their native languages, the most influential among which was English. Beginning with coastal colonies and treaty ports, the English language began to penetrate and spread throughout China. In the mid-nineteenth century, mission schools were established in China, which would not have been possible without the protection they received from the first unequal treaties forced on China in the 1840s by the British. These treaties usurped territory from China, opened port cities to trade and guaranteed that the activities of foreigners would not be regulated by China (Ford, 1988; Bickers, 1999; Austin, 1986; Fairbank, 1983).

During this period, some missionaries believed that the study of English could pave the way for Christianity by allowing Chinese people to more easily grasp the key concepts of the Christian worldview and by enabling them to read the English Bible and other religious materials in their original form. They viewed English language training as the path of least resistance through which to bring the hearts and minds of the Chinese people to God. Others promoted English as a way to introduce Western ideas to China and as a way to undermine Chinese traditions that they opposed. Still others carried this argument even further, advocating English instruction as a means to break down what they considered as “the superstitious and heathen Chinese ways of life” (Ford, 1988, p. 14). This was the period in which Christianity and modern Western practices were perceived as the savior of China, a country stuck far back on the inevitable upward march of progress. Thus, from the beginning, English language instruction was the handmaid of colonialism. This missionary element in English language teaching is particularly important in understanding the discourses on English and how English as a “global” language is not a neutral phenomenon, but laden with colonial implications.

It was also in this period when the Orientalist approach to China reached its height, when Europe colonized not only parts of China, but also knowledge about it. That is, the condescending and negative views of the missionaries towards China led to the “establishment of a large body of knowledge as part of the great colonial archive of knowledge about the Other” (Pennycook, 1998, p. 169). Various discursive techniques for dealing with those positioned as Other also emerged, such as the pervasive tendency to formulate the world through binaries – e.g., Self versus Other, enlightened versus backward, modern versus unchanging, good versus evil - which intensifies notions of Otherness. The development of such views was not an isolated process, but part of the broader process of colonization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Said (1978) demonstrates, there are a number of features which occur again and again in texts about colonized countries. These features cannot be attributed simply to the individual author's beliefs, but are rather due to larger belief systems structured by discursive frameworks, and are given credibility and force by the power relations found in imperialism. Colonial discourse does not therefore simply refer to a body of texts with similar subject matter, but rather refers to an institutional set of practices and rules which produced those texts and the methodological organization of the thinking underlying those texts.

Pennycook (1998) gives an extensive discussion of the series of stereotypes in Western representations of China: “the exotic and eternal kingdom, the underdeveloped and backward, the paradoxically juxtaposed old and new, the crowded, dirty and poverty-stricken life, the smiling or inscrutable exterior hiding either bad intentions or misery . . . and so on.” (p. 172). Although such constructions occur across a broad range of writing, one domain which has particular implications for this paper is writings by and for English language teachers in China. These writings produce discourses of Self and Other, that construct English and speakers of English in particular ways. Such cultural constructs still play a major role in how English language teaching is constructed and practiced: from the native speaker/non-native speaker dichotomy to the images of English as a global language and assumptions about speakers of English and their cultures.

A contemporary example of such constructs in relation to English language teaching in China could be seen in the discourse on English and native/nonnative speakers of English on the website of ELIC (English Language Institute/China), an organization that yearly sends Christian teachers, mainly from the United States, to teach English in Chinese universities across the country. Apart from clearly supporting a simple argument about the superiority of English, the view of the richness of English at this website also ascribes certain qualities to native speakers of English - the idea that native English speakers are role models who have the power to influence and save the unenlightened. It appears that native speakers are portrayed as superior not only because of their knowledge of the English language, but because of certain higher human qualities granted to them by the fact that they are native speakers of English. The following excerpts are taken from recruitment messages, supposedly addressed to future English instructors, which appeared on the ELIC website in April 2004:

ELIC (English Language Institute/China) first broke ground in 1982 by sending our first team of teachers into China . . . . Your passion to serve these people and bring them excellence in the English language will provide opportunity for you to influence each individual, one life at a time.

Deep within China's Himalayan frontier . . . the English language is revered. . . . You'll provide these students with a language they so desire to learn and a hope they so passionately seek . . . .

Imagine playing a major role in their process of a major life transformation. You don't need to speak Chinese. You don't need to be a teacher by trade. You just need to be willing . . . . Thousands of Chinese students await our arrival. Will you be there to offer them what they need most?

It's your chance to impact two generations - shepherds and the sheep - with your language and life.

We desire to educate and train superbly competent teachers of English, the global language of modernization and development, to enable those in developing countries to maximize their contribution to the holistic progress of society.

Such descriptions of English and its native speakers bear much resemblance to colonial binaristic constructions of Self and Other and show how constructs of the superiority of English play an important role in how English is understood as a language and how the native speaker in particular is portrayed. What is interesting in these descriptions is the assumed fusion of knowledge of the English language and the superiority of Self: it is the positive of the negative template of the Other – the non-native speaker of English – that provides moral definitions of the Self.

It is not my interest or intention here to vilify ELIC, but, as Pennycook (1998) suggests, such discourses in and around English have serious consequences. First, one of the most insidious constructions that have emerged from the glorification of English is the dichotomous relationship between native speakers and non-native speakers, with the former elevated over the latter. The way in which English is constructed as a superior language, when coupled with a belief that to know English is to have a better way of understanding and describing the world, makes the native speaker of English not merely a supposedly better teacher of English but also someone endowed with superior knowledge about the world. Second, the language on the website of ELIC (re)produces colonial constructions of English as a superior language for Western readers and English language teachers; this representation is intertwined with the larger “regime of representation” of Self and Other.

To be sure, a person's present understanding of the world is, of necessity, influenced by notions and knowledge she identifies with in subtle and significant ways, and one's perspectives on the world are never innocent of motives and motivation embedded in one's own historical moment and cultural positioning. If you ask the Chinese students, for example, they will almost surely come up with very different views, although perhaps also problematic, of their country, themselves, and their relationship to English as a global language. What is more important is to recognize the connections between ELIC's representation of English and its speakers and the profession of English language teaching. ELIC's mission to send English teachers to China is significant, as it is exactly such representations that construct part of the work and the knowledge of the Western English teacher in China. It is highly plausible that representations of English as a superior language can put into play particular approaches to teaching, and such fixed and essentialized notions of a language and its speakers can hold sway in many domains of English language teaching, and English language teaching – its practice, policy, institution, discipline – is a central contributor to the construction of English as a global language.

#### **4. Modern-day renditions of “Global English” in China**

As has been said before, English language teaching in China and its relationship with constructs of Self and Other are contingent upon the broader social and political relations between China and the West. The importance of English was drastically reduced by the Chinese government, during the 1950s and 1960s, when the Cold War chilled Sino-American relations and the Soviet influence was at its height. However, English came back into Chinese life with dramatic speed when the Cold War was over. Large numbers of foreigners began to visit and reside in China as part of a new open-door policy initiated by Deng Xiaoping, whose goal was to speed up the modernization process in China. In particular, since the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States in 1979, a host of American teachers, students and scholars have visited or worked in China.

Those English teachers sent from Western countries such as the United States and Britain become significant agents in the spread of English, taking over where colonial education left off. As Lam (1999) reports:

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest [in China] in the hiring of expatriates as teachers to provide more “native” models of the language to students whose proficiency in English has been widely considered inadequate in meeting the requirements of higher education and the workplace. (p. 378)

Initiated by colonial domination in the past and propelled by commerce, science, and technology in the present, the spread of English in the world has always been facilitated through instruction in the classroom, as witnessed by the rise of the English language teaching profession. Though missionary schools clearly failed in their primary goal of

converting masses of Chinese to Christianity, their educational activities left an important legacy in China. For instance, they initiated a pattern of practices of authoring and introducing textbooks and teaching methodologies, which the new generation of foreign teachers seem to have inherited. However, English language teaching in the new era appears in a new guise. Since English language teaching in China is always part of the larger geopolitical picture that defines China's relationship with the West, the spread of English in this period seems to go parallel with the spread of the culture of international business, consumerism, and technological standardization, which inevitably brings back the superior image of the West. As Phillipson (1988) explains, "the higher and better view of the West is now less represented by the gun and the Bible than by technology and the textbook. Western products still come wrapped in a Western language and in Western thought" (p. 341).

What I intend to do in the rest of this paper is to look at how China responds to "global English" and how China's responses are related to the operation of the hegemony of "global English." As Gramsci (1971) suggests, hegemony works when the dominated can be influenced in such a way that they accept dominance as natural, and act in the interest of the powerful out of their own free will. It appears the essence of hegemony that inequities are internalized or taken for granted by both the dominant and dominated groups as being natural and legitimate. The concept of hegemony, and its associated concepts of consensus and acceptance, suggests that many forms of dominance appear to be jointly produced through intricate forms of social interaction, socio-cultural values and assumptions, and discursive practices. In the case of English in China, consensus and acceptance in the form of Chinese support for the dissemination of English and Chinese students' participation in the process are part of the sources that contribute to the global hegemony of English. Thus, we should view the global dominance of English not ultimately as a direct consequence of imperialism but rather as partly a product of the local hegemonies of English. Any concept of the global hegemony of English must therefore be understood in the context of local responses - indeed, the global hegemony would have no material definitions without local responses.

In contemporary Chinese life, English has taken a position of unprecedented importance. It is seen as an essential tool in developing and changing the core of the country's economic system. As Sun (1999), a Chinese writing instructor, comments in the preface to his *Writing in English*, a textbook for Chinese college students, English has become a popular language for international communication in China. He describes English in China in terms of the role it plays in China's changing relationships with the rest of the world:

With the acceleration of the pace of reform in China, the exchange and cooperation between our country and the rest of the world, in the areas of economics, culture, education, and politics, have become more frequent and prevalent. In this process, the role of English as a means of communication has become more and more prominent. In order to assist the spread of English, to improve the English proficiency of the whole society, to meet the needs of the development of situations, English courses have been generally offered in elementary and high schools; various kinds of English programs have been set up; adult education in English has spread all over the country; various kinds of media such as radio and television have also made great contributions to the improvement of English proficiency of people from all walks of life. (p. 1)

Sun's comments are revealing in that they illustrate the complex network of apparatuses in China that accept and support the dominant role of English as a language of international communication. On the one hand, this network cooperates with colonial discursive constructions of English to reinforce the prominent role of English in international communication; on the other hand, it reveals the tension between global orientation and national identity in the modern era. This contradictory logic of modernity shows how the global status of a nation is created through the production of universalism and its appropriation, whether as a modernizing agenda or as a statement of world citizenship. While contributing to a larger position of the global hegemony of English, this complex network also becomes the site for the creation of a local hegemony, one consequence of which is that thousands of young men and women are inspired each year to either enroll in English programs within China or become part of the *liu xue* trend, i.e., the trend to go abroad to study, with the firm conviction that English can be their passport to a better life.

The Chinese government plays a central role in this local hegemony: it becomes the dominant "centripetal" force, to use Bakhtin's (1984) term, through dictating policies and systems to be implemented to facilitate English teaching and learning countrywide. In order to advance the country's political and economic interests, the central administration has put a predominant emphasis on the teaching, learning, and testing of English. Performance in compulsory English study from early secondary school on and scores on national examinations, including compulsory English, continue to be critical factors for entrance into post-secondary education positions. Meanwhile, scientists, technicians, teachers, and many other professionals are required to master English in order to read literature about advanced technology and management from developed countries. To further encourage English learning, various gate-keeping institutions and exam systems were established; for example, the demonstration of a certain level of English proficiency, usually through exams, becomes a necessity for promotion in many academic and professional fields. In other words, English

proficiency becomes a critical factor for professional success, a gateway to many social and material benefits. It also becomes the hallmark of an educated, cultured, and modern person and hence a marker of social position and prestige.

To some extent, English in China has attained a similar status to English in the colonial Kenya Ngugi (1986) describes in his *Decolonizing the Mind*. According to Ngugi, in the entrance requirements at university level in Kenya a high grade (a credit) rather than a pass in English was required. "Thus the most coveted place in the pyramid and in the system was only available to holders of an English language credit card. English was the official vehicle and the magic formula to colonial elitedom" (p. 115). Although there are drastic differences between scenarios in Kenya and China, i.e., Ngugi's Kenya was under colonial rule while China today is under the force of globalization, elitist, centralizing policies and regulations, as Ngugi suggests, may become a crucial instrument to sustain and uphold inequalities on different levels, between the West and colonial/postcolonial countries as well as between the elite in colonial/postcolonial countries and the majority who are deprived for various reasons.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed the historical contexts of English language teaching in China and their modern-day renditions, tracing connections between English language teaching and learning in China and the global context of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Informed by Foucault's archaeological and genealogical methods, I considered the political and ideological contexts in which English spread to China and examined how the assumptions about English, its native/nonnative speakers, and about China and Chinese learners that accompanied the spread of English to China in the nineteenth century manifest themselves in the postcolonial age, when Western teaching methods are imported under the label of science and foreign teachers continue to construct the English language, China and Chinese students in ways that are reminiscent of the larger regime of representation of the Other.

I want to end this paper by emphasizing a few points. First, the teaching and learning of English in a third-world/postcolonial country is never a simple transparent process with clear-cut meanings; this complexity only bespeaks the resilience of implications about English language teaching and learning in the Chinese context. Second, from Western constructions of Self and Other in relation to English language teaching in China, as seen in the language on the ELIC website, to Chinese government's policies regarding English language teaching and learning, we can see that English in China is indelibly linked with the (re)production of neocolonial relations between China and the West. This ambiguous legacy of English language teaching embedded in colonial relations defines and complicates the connection between local specificities and the global context of the hegemony of English. Third, I insist that "global English," no matter how much discursive construction may be involved in its representations, is not in itself entirely and exhaustively discursive. "Global English" for many non-native speakers exists as a living presence, a reality to be dealt with in earnest. And finally, I hope this paper may contribute to a more complex understanding of the learning experiences of Chinese students, both those from China and those in China, who have been much of the focus of discursive constructions of them as foreign or ESL students in conventional scholarship in second language education.

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## A New Approach to Public Speaking Course in ESL Classroom

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### Abstract

This paper is a project report on the experiment of an English public speaking and debating course with advanced level English majors in College of Arts and Science, Yangtze University. The paper analyzes the validity of the course, introduces the design rationale, the design and experiment process, and students' responses. The paper suggests that with further development, English public speaking and debating course could be considered as a basic oral training course for advanced-level English majors.

**Keywords:** Oral course for English majors, Public speaking, Debating

### 1. Introduction

In view of the reality that even some English majors could hardly speak decent English despite years of spoken English training, this essay explores the ways to develop English speaking and debating courses aiming at helping English majors break through the bottleneck in oral English communication and obtain their ability on consecutive speaking in public. The author has written this essay on the basis of the preliminary conclusions drawn through trial courses commenced in Yangtze University since 2007 as well as in its subsidiary Independent College since 2008, that is, that strict and systemic training through English speaking and debating courses helps students develop logical reasoning and English speaking competence.

### 2. Grounds for developing public speaking courses

Public speaking refers to the speaker's action in which he/she, as the center in the communication process, addresses the audience consecutively (Carlin 1995). It is an indispensable part of human activities, such as students answering questions in class or demonstrating ideas on certain topics, teachers holding lectures, and, as in working environment, work reports, production releases and introductions, commercial negotiations, meeting addresses, discussions and communications as well as commenting on certain topics in daily life.

The author proposes the development of public speaking courses among hi-grade English majors based on the following theory and reality: Speaking course is the integration of language drilling and context-based teaching: speaking course not only helps students learn the language, but improves their reasoning ability. Our spoken English teaching for English majors, ranging from low graders' spoken course to hi-graders' interpretation course, still dwells on sole language drills, students cultivated by this monotonous approach, though fluent at daily conversation, regrettably fails to meet the standard required by complicated circumstances, that is, they are still unable to utilize English as a tool for sound and sufficient communication under various circumstances, especially formal ones. The author has assumed a sample survey among students at each grade in the university's independent college English Department in May 2007 (25% of each grade have been sampled and the total number of samples at 150), and its content surrounds effect of spoken courses, self-evaluation of spoken level, time and motivation spent in extracurricular spoken practice, obstacles to spoken expression, interests in speaking courses etc. The survey found that over 3/4 of hi-graders didn't think themselves to be able to communicate effectively in English; over 3/4 of the polled students reported the lack of improvement of spoken level; nearly 1/3 of 4<sup>th</sup> grader reported sliding spoken level; students are lack in motivation to practice spoken English after class, teachers complain students are hesitant to express themselves in public, even if expressed, in an illogical, blank, shallow and in-organized way. As a result, we could see students are still miles away from the requirements in National Syllabus for College English Majors.

The author thinks the above-mentioned problems partly stems from the facts that our spoken English teaching, for a considerable period, only emphasized on the drilling of language forms and that the introduction for contextual teaching seemed superficial in which teachers only provide context such as a topic for them to address on while didn't assume rigid and systemic instruction during the process. As a result, students practiced English only for the purpose of the practice, without the knowledge on how to reason effectively, utilize evidences, organize opinions. If spoken teaching

couldn't break through the monotonous approach of language drilling, when students have accumulated certain degree of language skills, they will just become directionless on way to go on with improving spoken English.

The public speaking course aims to enhance students' spoken English level through contextual teaching on the basis that they have acquired sufficient basic language skills. Its final goal is to cultivate students' ability to use language for communication flexibly in real-life contexts. The course not only takes language as means and socialization as end, but emphasize on the cultivation of various abilities during socialization, such as logic and innovative thinking, proof collection, analysis, synthesiz-ation, organizational structure, fast response, confidence building and appreciation and assessment abiities(Grice 1998).

### 3. Course design and practice

#### 3.1 Teachers and students' attitudes toward the course

The 2007 survey showed that 93% of surveyed teachers considered it's necessary for students to acquire English speaking capabilities, 83% agreed that it be established in the English Department as a course, and also 77% of the surveyed students were willing to attend such kind of classes, which in turn boosted the author's determination to try on this course.

#### 3.2 The accessibility assessment

First of all, Universities and colleges generally have obtained the basic teaching tools needed in this course such as recorders, monitors, video recorders, projectors . It will be ideal if camcorders are available.

Secondly, though still short of suitable public speaking textbooks in market, we have sufficient foreign and local resources to refer to and revise as seen necessary, moreover, we can also find abundant English public speeches via internet.

#### 3.3 Reference books and teaching materials

The author has referred to related foreign textbooks (see References for their range),among them *English Speaking and Debating course*(Ji Yuhua, 2001) is mainly concerned, which, taking into account factors like Chinese cultural background and students' characters, comprises 15 units with each unit covering a single theme and aims to develop students' preliminary speaking skills on a graded basis. Its specific contents include general theory on public speech, techniques for effective listening, basic models for speeches OPAM(Occasion, Purpose, Audience, Method), analysis on audience demands, topics and arguments structuring, material selection and integral structuring( topic opening, argument developmenst, topic concluding,transition), argument underpinning, language styles, body language application, tonal exercises(distinct tonal changes), information-driven speeches, persuasion-targeted speeches, ceremonial speeches, impromptu speeches and fast thinking, debating knowledge and techniques etc. After systemic learning of the textbook, students are supposed to master the basic skills to think logically, express substantively and justifiably.

#### 3.4 Application of Audio-visual materials

As newbies in learning English public speaking, students need be shown some successful precedents to reflect and make up for their own shortcomings. For techniques, such as tonal character and body language, that are hard to be communicated to students in words, AV materials is a better way. For instance, the students having attended this course ,after hearing Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech, were most impressed by his tonal character.

#### 3.5 Analysis on students' speeches through feedback sheets

When analyzing speeches, if there's no detailed criteria, feedback provider can only talk blankly and receiver get less information. In order for students to be clear about the principles and criteria to comply with, the textbook offers a series of feedback sheets to assess speaker in terms of body language, speech structure, persuasion power, verbal expression ability and general effect. Teachers should instruct students in using feedback sheets to analyze their own and other members' speeches.

### 4. Class design and practice

#### 4.1 Design of public speaking class

The author, since 2007, has been authoring an spoken English course for seniors in Yangtze University with a duration of 1 semester, and a speaking course for juniors of Yangtze's independent college English Department. The courses are proceeded as following: 2 students make prepared topic speeches before the whole class each for 5 minutes, then the teacher lead the whole class to analyze the speeches using relative feedback sheets and raise suggestions to the speakers. In the following hour the teacher introduces certain techniques concerning speech-making existing in a certain unit such as linguistic characters, body language etc. in a form of two-way communication, meanwhile playing corresponding AV materials. And If time still allows, divide the class into several groups(4,5 persons for each group), led by a leader, to practice in groups. In this we have borrowed from some practices done at foreign speech club-Toastmasters Club: the

teacher has to designate the leaders for groups in next class as the current class ends. Before the class group leaders shall get prepared with topics with developing potential, that is, ones everyone is able to have a say on (such as “smoking”), and inform members about the topic so that they can collect materials for it.

When group activities begin, the leader assigns different sub-topics to members based on the main topic (such as “We smokers want our rights!” “We non-smokers want our rights!” “Is smoking really bad?”), and then invites members for formal impromptu speech (each with time limit of 3-5 min.). The leader records his/her own observation on feedback sheet. As each speaker finishes, the leader organizes discussion on that and gives 2-3 minutes’ feedback comments. After the group activity finishes, the leader will make a conclusive speech and also be responsible for a summary report submitted to the teacher after class listing the speaker’s advantages and disadvantages. The role of group leader will be rotated by students.

The group activities mentioned above aim to cultivating students’ observation and leading abilities. Based on what the teacher observed, students quite enjoy this approach. In these groups students participate, listen and analyze speaker’s language use, observe his/her body language, give sincere feedbacks, and meanwhile develop their organizing and leading abilities through rotating as group leaders.

#### 4.2 Design of Debating class

Based on classes’ student number, divide them into several teams, with 4-5 students in each team. After confirming the team members, teachers instruct them to decide on topics through brainstorming approach, whose purpose is to let students join in debate actively. Each team chooses at least 5 topics and report the choice to the whole class. Each topic is numbered for teams to choose at random. Thus topics and teams for the 1<sup>st</sup> round of debates appear. Each team prepares their debating presentation after class and contend with the rival one in the next class by means of single-cycle or double-cycle competition forms. The champion of a class’s debating competition is the team that never loses. However, the actual procedure of the debate can be varied to adjust to students’ levels, and so does the time limit.

### 5. Students’ Feedback

As the course ended, the author had surveyed on all students in anonymous form, only to receive a similar results with the former one. Students are pretty positive to the opening of this class, and when answering “Did you enjoy this course?”, 90% of them gave positive answers.

#### 5.1 The Greatest achievements from English speaking and debating class on students’ part

They have improved their confidence to speak in public and strengthened context awareness.

#### 5.2 The development of the ability to utilize English integrally

Based on the above survey results, about 85% of the students think this course improved their ability to utilize English integrally, 89% of the students are more strongly motivated to learn English and 77% more strongly motivated to speak English.

#### 5.3 Cultivation of thinking

75% of the students felt their reasoning ability has been improved and 65% though the same with their creative thinking.

#### 5.4 The necessity of the course

98% of the students think it’s necessary for junior and senior English majors to receive training on English speaking and debating, 78% think it’s more suitable for juniors, and nearly half of them think it be established as obligatory course instead of optional.

### 6. Conclusion

The above survey feedback, though subjective in nature, demonstrate the course’s significance in reinvigorating students in learning spoken English, thinking logically and innovatively, improving context awareness and confidence. Debating classes liberate students from sheer language training and show them the right path and end to learn English: that is, being a successful communicator. The author advises as this course develops, it can be considered as a fundamental course for systematically training hi-grade English majors’ spoken communication abilities.

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## An Evaluation of the English Immersion Approach in the Teaching of Finance in China

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### Abstract

The English immersion teaching approach adopted by SEIB of GDUFS in China was developed on the basis of the immersion theory which was originally developed in North America. Its purpose is to create a learning environment in which the students acquire knowledge in business with English as the main carrier. The adoption of this approach aims to cultivate students with qualifications in both English language proficiency and business knowledge and skills. EDIF is one of the departments within SEIB that has implemented this approach since its establishment in 2001. The paper analyzes the implementation of English immersion teaching approach in the teaching of finance in EDIF from the perspectives of curriculum design, teacher training and recruitment, textbook selection and compilation and classroom teaching. Finally by comparing the results of language proficiency tests of EDIF students and those of the English majors of other colleges in China and by analyzing the employment situation of EDIF graduates, this paper concludes that students of EDIF outperform the other college students in both English language proficiency and employment competitive advantage. This indicates that English immersion teaching approach adopted by EDIF is effective and successful in the cultivation of students in both English proficiency and business knowledge.

**Keywords:** English immersion teaching approach, Teaching of finance, Evaluation

### 1. Introduction

Since its reformation and opening up in 1978, China has witnessed great leap forward in economic development, especially in the area of finance. Furthermore, globalization worldwide and China's entry into WTO at the beginning of this millennium have been accelerating this trend and encouraging more and more foreign financial organizations to set up their branches in China. As a result, there is an increasing demand for personnel in both English proficiency and professional financial knowledge in China. In an attempt to satisfy this potential demand, the English Department for International Finance (EDIF) in the School of English for International Business (SEIB) was established in 2001.

SEIB was among the first few university departments in China who launched a brand new teaching model aiming at nurturing students in both English proficiency and professional business knowledge during their college life --- "English + Business" model. The English immersion teaching approach was developed in order to meet the target of this model. As one of the programs in SEIB, EDIF has been adopting and further enhancing this teaching methodology since its establishment in 2001.

### 2. Literature review

The notion of the English immersion teaching approach originates from the "Immersion in Target Language" teaching methodology. In the early 1960s, a new theory concerning second language acquisition --- learning the target language in an environment where the learner is immersed in the target language --- gained great popularity in Canada. This was first implemented in primary schools in Canada in the acquisition of French as a second language, where English was the first language.

The Immersion teaching approach was mainly developed based on Krashen's Input Hypothesis. According to this theory humans acquire language in only one way --- by understanding messages or by receiving 'comprehensible input'

(Krashen, 1985). The reason why it is successful is that the learners have been provided with comprehensible input. Cook (1993) argues that for the learner to progress rather than remain static, the input has always to be slightly beyond the level at which he or she is completely at home.

Immersion teaching methodology development was based on the theory that the target language is best acquired if the learner is placed in the target language environment. This placement can be further divided into two types of immersion: complete and partial. The former refers to immersions in all aspects of one's life while the latter is immersion in aspects concerning classroom teaching and learning, such as textbooks, teaching media, classroom discussion, assignments and tests, etc. The purpose of immersion is to immerse the language learners in the target language environment as much as possible so as to improve the language learning efficiency (Cohen, 1998; Cai, 2005).

Ever since then, many a researcher has conducted huge number of studies on the effectiveness of "Immersion in Target Language" teaching approach (Kinberg, 2001; Fred Genessee, 1984 and Swain and Lapkin, 1982, cited in Cai, XL, 2005; etc.). The results show that language proficiency of the target language learners who have been immersed in the target language environment has been improved to a significant extent, implying that this language acquisition method is effective.

With the success of immersion theory in Canadian Primary schools, later in the 80s, the University of Ottawa created the "Sheltered Programs" model, also known as "late, late immersion", to introduce the theory into a university context. According to this model, the second language proficiency of the university students is supposed to be acquired in professional courses where the second language is the only carrier of knowledge (Qiang & Siegel, 2004).

However, unlike the early immersion in target language teaching approach aiming simply to enhance language acquisition, "Sheltered Programs" models attach importance to both language acquisition and knowledge learning. The English Immersion teaching approach adopted by EDIF shares a lot similarity with the "sheltered Programs" model in that business knowledge is learnt together with language proficiency and that English language is learnt as a by-product (Cai, 2001). In other words, English is not learned as a target language, but rather acquired in the process of learning business knowledge. This is in line with Wesche (Professor of the University of Ottawa) in that in the learning process, students are exposed sufficiently to a perfect second language learning environment where their attention is directed to the content of the professional knowledge instead of the language itself (cited in Ma, 1994).

One thing that differs the English immersion teaching approach adopted by EDIF from that by the University of Ottawa is that the former aims to help learners to acquire English as a foreign language in Chinese-speaking culture while the latter intends to help learners to acquire French as a second language in an English-dominating culture. As we know, from the perspective of linguistics, English shares a lot with French while Chinese is largely different from English. Will the immersion teaching approach which works so successful in Canada in the acquisition of French also be effective in China in the learning of English?

To answer this question, this essay is going to first analyze the factors influencing the implementation of the English immersion approach adopted in TEIF throughout the whole teaching and learning process: curriculum design, teacher training and recruitment, textbook selection and compilation and classroom teaching and then evaluate the effectiveness of English immersion teaching approach in Chinese culture in terms of English language proficiency and finance knowledge.

### **3. Implementation of the immersion approach in EDIF**

#### *3.1 Curriculum Design*

Based on the theory of Krashen, when designing curriculum for EDIF, we have taken into consideration the ratio between language courses and finance courses as well as the link between the two types of courses. By so doing we aimed to ensure that students systematically learn professional financial knowledge in English only after they have acquired adequate English competence and a certain amount of basic knowledge in financial terms and concepts.

##### *3.1.1 Ratio analysis*

Curriculum for EDIF consists of three parts: pathway courses, EDIF courses and Field work (Table 1). EDIF courses consist of 105 credits, 73 for required courses (45% of the total credits), 32 for elective ones (19% of the total). Of the required credits, 67 are for language courses and six for finance courses.

According to Table 1, the ratio of the number of courses in EDIF for English language teaching and finance knowledge teaching is 26:23, including both required and elective courses. However, some courses such as comprehensive English are counted as four courses. They are the same course in nature but are taught for four consecutive semesters varied only in terms of difficulty. Other finance-related courses such as Cross-cultural Communication Skills are counted as language courses. If these factors are considered, the number of finance courses is slightly higher than that of the language courses. What warrants mentioning are the elective credits for EDIF courses. Despite the fact that elective courses only account for 32 credits, students are provided with 28 courses, amounting to 57 credits (14 for English

elective courses and 43 for finance related courses). This leaves students more freedom in the selection and allocation of courses in the two different disciplines.

### 3.1.2 Link between English courses and Finance courses

The nature of the English Immersion teaching approach calls for a relatively high English proficiency in the students who are involved in this program. As a result, apart from a high benchmark for admission of the students to this program (Note 1), a great deal of importance has been attached to the improvement of students' English language ability (including both English language knowledge and the skills to use English in financial activities) before they start to learn business knowledge. The purpose is to ensure a smooth transition from the learning of language to the learning of finance knowledge in English. To achieve this goal, we have been trying to design different courses at different learning stages, with a view to a reasonable and logical connection between language courses and finance courses.

As is shown in Table 2, as the main task for the first-year students of EDIF is to improve their English proficiency as a whole, the courses designed are mostly language-orientated, with five required language courses amounting to 26 credits. There are only ten Business-related credits, mainly for such courses as Advanced Mathematics, Statistics, etc. The second learning phase involves language-orientated courses supplemented by basic finance courses. This phase focuses more on the cultivation of abilities in English language use and communication skills in the general financial environment. There are six English courses amounting to 20 credits and four basic finance courses amounting to four required credits and five elective credits respectively. Of the six English courses, three are transitional courses such as Finance English, Cross-cultural Communication and Readings from Business-related Newspapers and Magazines.

More finance courses are added to the curriculum at the third stage, while the number of language courses is reduced. There are as many as 10 courses concerning finance or other business knowledge available to junior students, most of which are elective courses. A further reduction on language courses is seen in the last phase. In the first term of the fourth year, except for two language courses such as Advanced English Writing and English-Chinese/Chinese-English Interpreting, there are five business courses amounting to ten credits available for students to choose from. The second term is totally devoted to field work and dissertation writing. Students are required to write a dissertation in English about finance and related business knowledge, the purpose of which is to enhance their comprehensive ability in the use of English language knowledge and in the application of their business knowledge to the solution of specific problems.

We believe that language courses and finance courses in English are complementary to each other, not independent of each other. Therefore, in curriculum design, a reasonable ratio of and a logical and smooth connection between the courses of both English discipline and finance discipline are the keys to the success of "English + Business" education model.

### 3.2 Recruitment and training of teaching staff

As has been discussed above, students of EDIF program need to learn both English as a language and also knowledge related to finance or other business with English as the carrier. This of course calls for higher qualification of teachers involved in this program. Language teachers may be qualified for language courses or finance-related language courses after receiving a certain period of training. However, for professional finance courses carried by English, we need teachers who are qualified in this field and who also have adequate English proficiency. Therefore, the recruitment and maintenance of a team of qualified teaching staff is an important task for EDIF.

At the time when EDIF was established, most of its teaching staff was language teachers with good command of English proficiency but limited knowledge in business disciplines. On the other hand, in spite of there being a large number of professional business teachers in China, relatively poor English proficiency of these teachers makes it hard for them to be qualified for teaching in our program. Hence, with a view to ensuring high teaching quality and the further implementation of our pedagogic beliefs we make it clear to our existing young teachers that they need to shape their teaching and research fields. And to be qualified, they are also expected to obtain relevant master's or doctor's degrees in their selected fields. Aside from this, we have also tried hard to recruit new teaching staff from home and abroad.

Our principles for the training and recruiting of teaching staff are mainly as follows:

- 1) encouraging teachers to attend lectures and courses given by distinguished professors in the field of finance and related business in our university
- 2) encouraging and financing teachers aged under 40 to pursue further master's or doctor's degrees in the field of finance or business at home and abroad
- 3) recruiting new finance staff with higher academic degree and teaching and research ability and
- 4) hiring senior professors in finance from abroad.

As long as 7 years' practice of these principles has helped us improve the quality of the teaching staff. As can be seen

from Table 3, 99% of all teachers in SEIB have obtained a master's or doctor's degrees. Of these 35 are teachers of finance. The number of teachers who have obtained master's degree or doctor's degrees in both English language and business is 8. Most of the teachers in SEIB have learned English as a second language or have lived or studied in English-speaking countries for sometime, which helps to meet the requirement for the teaching of business knowledge in English.

As far as EDIF is concerned, as is shown in Table 4, there are altogether 22 teachers who teach finance in English. Nine of these are masters in finance and four of them are doctoral students in finance, occupying 41% of all professional business teachers.

A survey by Cai (2002) on the satisfaction with teaching in EDIF may more or less explain the positive result of the recruitment and training of qualified teaching staff. According to him, 77% of the students surveyed felt satisfied with teachers' performance in class and their knowledge in both professional field and language.

### 3.3 Textbook selection and compilation

Another key factor that determines the effectiveness of the English Immersion teaching approach in EDIF is the selection and development of textbooks that are compiled in English. At present, the textbooks adopted in EDIF program mainly fall into three types: 1) those compiled by teachers at home; 2) those compiled by teachers in EDIF; and 3) those introduced from abroad.

Most textbooks related to language teaching are in the first category. However, in order to ensure a more natural and smooth transition from pure English courses to professional knowledge courses, a group led by Professor Cai of SEIB has compiled a new series of textbooks for comprehensive English course: *Business English: an Integrated Course*. The objective of the compilation of these books is to help freshmen and sophomores to familiarize themselves with business terms in English, business English stylistics and discourses with business characteristics, thus providing them with a solid foundation for the learning of professional knowledge carried by English later on.

As far as the finance textbooks compiled in English are concerned, of the 12 finance courses in the EDIF program, eight select textbooks introduced from abroad, three use those compiled by the teaching staff of EDIF and one chooses those compiled by teachers at home other than EDIF.

To ensure the immersion of finance courses in English to its largest extent, the choice of textbooks introduced from abroad is critical and essential. The reasons are as follows: First of all, that these textbooks are compiled by native English-speaking experts ensures the appropriateness of the English language. Secondly, that most textbooks are compiled by authoritative experts in relative business areas guarantees the authoritativeness of the textbooks. Thirdly, most textbooks introduced from abroad are supplemented with further reading materials, case studies and other exercises which can help students not only in the learning of knowledge but also in the application of knowledge.

Because of these advantages, the textbooks for EDIF business courses are mostly those from abroad. However, we also apply the following principles in the selection of these textbooks:

- 1) authoritative --- textbooks should be compiled by authoritative experts in relative fields;
- 2) up-dated --- textbooks should include up-dated theories and knowledge in certain fields;
- 3) appropriate --- the language of the textbooks should be appropriate for students of EDIF; and
- 4) operational --- textbooks should be supplemented with teaching discs and exercises.

In teaching practice, we also have encouraged teachers to use cases or concepts which are more closely related to Chinese business practice. 62% of the subjects in a survey conducted by Zhu (2005) reported that a combination of finance textbooks from abroad and at home helped produce a better and desired result in the students.

### 3.4 Teaching Activities

The aim of improving teaching activities is to better live out the target for personnel cultivation in EDIF. In the 7 years' teaching practice in EDIF program, we have tried to adopt a combination of different teaching methods such as lecturing, seminar, case analysis, task-based teaching, social practice, etc.

Some EDIF courses require that students should have a certain level of knowledge in science, especially in mathematics, which inevitably makes it rather difficult for students of arts whose mathematics is relatively poor. As a result, it arouses a sense of fear and anxiety in quite a few students. As is proposed by Krashen (1985) in his "affective filter" hypothesis, the learner is "unmotivated, lacking in self-confidence, or anxious if the affective filter is so high up that it prevents input from getting through". In view of this, teachers are careful in creating a relaxed and comfortable learning environment. For example, some of the teachers start their teaching with warming-up activities such as cases or problems in financial fields with a view to cultivating students' interest in financial knowledge, stimulating their enthusiasm for learning and arousing their motivation and building their confidence in finance courses. While in class, teachers lay stress on interactive and communicative methods of teaching. They use various teaching activities such as

presentation and seminar discussion to help students actively involved into their learning process.

Finance is a discipline that is closely related to practice, and case study is seen to be a sound means to relate financial theory to practice. Therefore, since its establishment by Christopher Columbus Langdell in the 1870s (Han, 2005), as a teaching activity, case studies have been widely adopted in the teaching of finance and other business disciplines. The aim of case studies is to help students improve their ability in the application of knowledge acquired and their ability in analysis, inference, induction and summarization. Therefore, it is understandable that case analysis ranks first in the list of the most highly adopted teaching activities by teachers of EDIF. A questionnaire conducted in SEIB shows that 95.7% of the students are satisfied with case analysis teaching activity (Han, 2005).

Finance is also a discipline that is highly theoretical, hence problem/project-based learning and task-based learning teaching methods are also widely adopted by our teaching staff. For example in the teaching process, teachers will design some related questions for students to discuss in groups and then report to the class. Or for each semester, they will design research questions for students to prepare after class. After instruction from the teachers, students are expected to conduct a mini-research on one or two of them in small groups and write a term paper based on the results. These ways of teaching on one hand help students actively involved in their learning process, on the other hand help them practice their ability in the application of the knowledge learned, in the analyses of the problems proposed and in the communication skills required in financial environment.

What needs to be noticed is that throughout the whole teaching process, teachers of EDIF program are required to ensure that English is the main carrier of classroom teaching and learning. With a solid English language foundation built at an earlier stage and the activities and strategies teachers adopted for the reduction of anxiety in classroom teaching, students of EDIF gradually gain confidence in learning the subjects of finance given in English.

#### **4. Evaluation**

The evaluation of students' ability in EDIF can be conducted from two perspectives: English proficiency and finance knowledge. The former can be measured by a comparison of the results of TEM 4 and TEM 8 between EDIF students and English majors of other schools and universities while the latter can be assessed by analyzing the employment competitiveness of the graduates in EDIF as no relevant national financial test is available presently. (Note2)

As is shown in Table 5, the results of both TEM 4 and TEM8 of EDIF students from 2004 to 2006 are far better than English majors of the other Chinese colleges. This indicates that students of EDIF are at a higher level in terms of their English language proficiency despite the fact they devote half less of their time to the study of English language courses than those English majors of other colleges, which to some extent implies the effectiveness of English immersion teaching approach in the acquisition of English language.

According to Table 6, all graduates from 2004 to 2006 were either employed or pursuing further education at home or abroad. Most of the employed students have their jobs in large promising enterprises of foreign ventures, joint ventures or joint cooperation and other big financial organizations, such as KPMG (Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler), PWC (PricewaterhouseCoopers), EY (Ernst & Young), and DTT(Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu).

In China, with the expansion in the enrollment of higher education, more and more college graduates are faced with ever intensifying threat of unemployment. For example, according to People's daily, the employment rate of college graduates in 2006 is as low as 73%. Meanwhile, graduates of EDIF not only are able to find a job, but more importantly, able to find a decent job, which more or less indicates that the graduates cultivated by EDIF's "Business + Business" model is in line with the need for talents in the labor market.

#### **5. Conclusions**

From the curriculum design to the training and recruiting of teaching staff, to the choice and compilation of textbooks and finally to the adoption of teaching activities, EDIF has succeeded in implementing the English immersion teaching approach in the entire process of our teaching practice. The evaluation of the implement of the new model (English + Finance) and English immersion teaching approach catering for this model adopted by EDIF has proven to be effective in cultivating personnel qualified in both English language proficiency and finance knowledge and skills, therefore is accordance with the requirement for economic globalization.

However, as a new model, it is also confronted with many difficulties and is far from perfect. There lacks adequate preparation courses before courses in finance. Difficulty in recruiting and maintaining staff qualified both in English and Finance poses another problem. Some textbooks compiled by domestic teachers are to an extent not so satisfied and those introduced from abroad are somewhat deviated from Chinese finance practice. Aside from all these, the means of evaluation of students' ability in finance is not scientific enough, leaving large room for the conduction of future research. However, despite all these difficulties, EDIF has made the first step forward and has every confidence in moving even further.

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## Notes

Note 1. This is measured by the results of National Entrance Examination in China.

Note 2. TEM (Test for English Major) is a national test in China administrated by National Advisory Commission on Foreign Language Teaching in Higher Education (NACFLT) for English Majors nationwide. TEM4 is supposed to be taken by sophomores while TEM8 by seniors. The Certificate is issued by NACFLT and is commonly used.

Table 1. Credit Distribution for EDIF Curriculum

Courses		Credits	% of total credits
Pathway Courses	Required	28	17
	Elective	18	11
EDIF Courses	Required	English	41
		Finance	4
	Elective	32	19
Field Work		14	8
Total		<b>165</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2. Curriculum Design of EDIF in Terms of Learning Phases

Phase	Total credit	Required Finance courses		Required English courses		Elective Finance courses		Elective English courses	
		No. of Courses	Credit						
1	105	0	0	5	26	4	10	0	0
2		2	4	6	20	2	5	2	4
3		1	2	5	14	9	18	4	8
4		0	0	3	7	5	10	1	2

Table 3. Teaching Staff in SEIB

Academic Degree	Discipline	Number	Percentage
Bachelors	Linguistics	2	2
	Linguistic and Literature	54	51
Masters (13 Doctors-to-be Included)	TEIB	6	6
	Business	25	24
	Linguistic + Business	8	8
	Sub-total	93	89
Doctors	Linguistics	8	8
	Business	2	2
	Sub-total	10	10
	Total	105	100

Table 4. Teaching Staff in EDIF

Academic Degree	Discipline	No.
Master	Finance and Accounting	9
	Others	11
	Sub-total	20
Doctor	Economics	2
	Total	22

Table 5. A Comparison of Results of TEM4 and TEM8 between EDIF students and English majors in other Chinese colleges

	2004 pass %		2005 pass %		2006 pass %	
	TEM4	TEM8	TEM4	TEM8	TEM4	TEM8
Other colleges	87	80	76	83	79	74
EDIF	92	92	100	88	98	80

Table 6. 2004 -2006 EDIF graduates employment situation

Year	Employed	Further education at home	Further education abroad	Total	Employment %
2004	71	11	9	91	100%
2005	42	5	2	49	100%
2006	24	1	0	25	100%



## Essay Topic Writability Examined through a Statistical Approach from the College Writer's Perspective

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### Abstract

No published studies have sufficiently focused on essay topic writability from the perspective of college writers of the new millennium including native English speakers and ESL speakers. In this study, 500 college writers in Metro Toronto in Canada were interviewed to uncover if they found some essay topics easier than other topics. The results indicate that over 90% of them did. The interviewees explained that factors determining the writability of an essay topic include knowledge, interest, experience, and data availability. The positive responses are examined along with the negative ones. Cross-comparison confirms consistency between the two groups. In agreement with previous studies, through a statistical approach and by focusing on essay topic writability, this study alerts frontline teachers as well as language testing administrators to the issue of consistency of difficulty of essay topics in examinations, which can lead to improved validity of such writing tests and examinations across disciplines.

**Keywords:** Essay topic writability, College writer, Knowledge, Interest, Experience, Data

### 1. Introduction

According to Applebee, Langer, and Mullis (1987), writing serves as a tool for three thought processes basic to learning: 1) to draw on relevant knowledge and experience in preparation for new activities, 2) to consolidate and review new information and experience, and 3) to reformulate and extend knowledge. In other words, writing may be interpreted as a knowledge-based activity that consolidates itself or snowballs in the process of learning from the student's perspective. In their recent study, twenty years after the publication of the aforementioned study, Lee and Anderson find that "it is hard to identify how far writers' general linguistic competency would account for the performance of a specific task [...]" (2007:327). Lee and Anderson recommend that further research be conducted to illuminate the role of background knowledge on these topics more clearly by using a separate measure of students' knowledge critically related to each of the three topics used in the current writing test (2007). It is a well-known fact that other than writing ability, factors such as knowledge, information, and experience may affect the quality of a student's writing. Numerous studies on topic validity, rating schemes and frameworks, effects of topic interest and prior knowledge on second/foreign-language reading and listening and writing have been conducted (e.g., Lee & Anderson, 2007; Harris et al., 2006; Wing et al., 2006; Cumming et al., 2002; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Reaves et al., 1993; Baldwin et al., 1985). However, no published studies have sufficiently focused on essay topic writability examined from the perspective of college writers of the new millennium including both native English speakers and ESL speakers. As difficult to measure as any other form of mental activity, the influence of linguistic competency on an essay topic may not be immediately available in a statistical format. Nonetheless, this study is intended as the first step to start the attempt by identifying the causal factors of essay topic writability from the college writer's perspective, and through a statistical approach. Lee and Anderson point out that "with the growing use and interest in integrated writing measurements among test users and developers, these inquiries could become important leads for future researchers" (2007:327). It is the author's belief that knowing the determining factors of the degree of difficulty of essay topics not only will benefit researchers, but also examination administrators, examiners, and especially classroom teachers of first and second languages, and that it can improve the validity of essay writing tests and ultimately enhance curriculum delivery by means of appropriate placement of students and beyond. It is with this purpose that the author conducts this study.

### 2. Collection of data

Between Christmas of 2006 and New Year's Day of 2008, 500 students randomly selected from colleges in the Toronto area in Canada were interviewed. The data generated from these interviews constitute the primary data of this study. It should be pointed out that 43% of Metro Toronto's population of five million is defined as visible minorities. (Javed &

Keung, 2008:A1, A12-A13). The author assumes that native English speakers consist of approximately 70% of the interviewees, though no question was asked about the interviewees' first languages, since it had never been the author's intention to separate English speakers from ESL/EFL speakers. In the author's view, a study of a heterogeneous group will more accurately represent the general population in Canada and likely the United States and most other English-speaking countries.

The author's interview comprises 6 questions designed to uncover whether or not college writers find certain essay topics easier or more difficult than other topics. And if they do, what is the reason? Three of the questions, worded differently, in essence, ask for the same answer or explanation, aiming to verify the validity of their answers. It is the last summary answer or explanation that appears to be the most valid, for it was provided after the interviewees had given examples of easy and difficult topics to support their previous explanations and answers. (See the appendix for details of the survey.)

A small number of interviewees answered No or N/A to the first question, which technically indicates that the interview was over, but they went on to answer the rest of the questions. The primary purpose of continuing the interview with them was to verify the validity of their first answer: the author wanted to know whether they answered No or N/A to the first question because they really meant it, or because they had insufficient time to deliver an accurate answer, or misunderstood the question for any reason. The subsequent answers and the examples of easy topics and difficult topics and explanations provided by the "No" respondents are thus cross-compared with those of the majority—the "Yes" respondents.

### 3. Data analysis

It is no news that student writers of different age groups perform differently. Children's writing development involves strategic behavior, knowledge, and motivation (e.g., Graham & Mason, 2006). At the theoretical level, Alexander, Graham and Harris (1996), among others, discern knowledge as strategic knowledge and domain-specific knowledge. When high school graduates start their college education, however, this pattern of development does not seem to exist based on analysis of their answers. First, examine the answers (Table 1) to the first question of the interview: "Do you find some essay topics easier to write on than other essay topics?"

As Table 1 indicates, of the 500 interviewees 452 found some essay topics easier than other topics. Forty-one gave a "No" answer, while 7 answered neither "Yes" nor "No." What deserves one's attention is that the explanations of the "Yes" and "No" groups to the easy topic given as an example appear to have much in common. Compare the respective answers to those of Question 3—"Could you please explain why (the topic you have just given is easy for you)?"—in Table 2.

Not surprisingly, the results of the survey reveal that examples of easy topics given by some college students, such as "Sports," "Music," and "Politics," may turn out to be difficult ones for other students. Except two students in the "N/A" group who stated throughout that they were not good at writing and therefore all writing was equally difficult for them, all the 498 interviewees provided an essay topic that was easy for them and explained why. As Table 2 indicates, the biggest group found an essay topic easier if they have the necessary knowledge: the "Knowledge Subgroup" constitutes 33.8% (out of the 90.4%) of the "Yes" group, and 2.4% (out of the 8.2%) of the "No" group. It is not immediately clear why some participants answered no to the first question, and yet gave answers similar to the "Yes" group to Question 3. It is possible that they may dislike essay writing, or find all writing equally difficult, or would rather not distinguish the easier topics from the harder ones. For the two interviewees who said that they were not good writers and that all topics were impossible for them, there was no question of easier topics and harder topics. These two were consistent with the answers from beginning till end, but except for these two, the other five "N/A" respondents still share similarity in their explanations with those of the "Yes" majority, noticeably claiming that one finds an essay topic easier when he/she has the experience.

According to the "Yes" majority, the second most important factor that makes essay writing easier is interest. The author has no intention to review the old issue of whether prior knowledge and interest are highly correlated as some scholars have claimed (e.g., Guthrie, 1981) or if prior knowledge and topic interest are autonomous factors (Baldwin et al., 1985). Nevertheless, according to the analysis of the answers given by the interviewees, interest in this context is simply defined as willingness, eagerness, and joy that students have or experience in the process of writing. Hardly did any one of the interviewees mention directly or indicate clearly whether or not their topic interest came with prior knowledge. In light of the availability of data, the author thus chooses to avoid further discussion of the issue, and to focus on the jargon-free examination of the data generated from the interviewees. The Interest Subgroup—100 in the "Yes" Group and 6 in the "No" Group—forms 21.2%. The knowledge and interest subgroups combined form a clear majority of 57.4%. Then except with the two non-writers, as indicated in Table 2, data and experience other than unreported reasons also contribute to the writability of a college essay topic.

Regarding “Other” in Table 2 and the other tables, it refers to activities or events that any single item listed in the tables does not suffice to cover accurately, such as “I am taking a course,” “I have a family,” and “I’ve got a piano at home.” Another reason for listing such explanations as “Other” is to reduce the risk of misunderstanding the interviewees.

After the interviewees explained why a certain topic was easier for them, they were asked to name a topic that was difficult or impossible for them. As mentioned above, topics such as “Sports,” “Music” and “Politics” may be furnished as examples of easier ones by some students, but may turn out to be difficult topics for others. Nonetheless, the specific topics given by the participants are not our focal discussion. What this study attempts to discover, as mentioned previously, is why they are harder or easier.

From another perspective, the interviewees explained that they found an essay topic more difficult if they lacked what is listed in Table 3.

As indicated in Table 3, lacking knowledge, interest, data and experience is what makes college essay writing more difficult. Except the two non-writers, the 498 interviewees each gave a reason why they found some essay topics more difficult than other topics. The explanation further supports the previous one that explains why one essay topic may be easier than another. In other words, each individual interviewee’s explanation reported in Table 3 verifies his or her previous statement through a negative answer. What deserves one’s attention is that in Table 3 the Knowledge Subgroup increases to 44.6% from the previous 36.2%. The Interest Subgroup, though decreasing to 19.6% from 21.2%, remains the second largest. These two groups combined form a clear majority of 64.2%. Again, this strongly indicates that knowledge and interest alone may make an essay topic easier for the majority of college students. The rest of the factors, including data, experience and others, may play an equally important role for the other 35.4% of the interviewees. One is reminded that this set of factors corresponds to the explanations given through the positive answers.

To allow the interviewees one last opportunity to summarize, repeat or change their answers and explanations that they had given previously, the author requested a summary explanation from each of the interviewees: “Could you please summarize again why (or why not) some essay topics are easier to write on than other essay topics?” The answers are listed in Table 4.

In their summary statements, all groups combined, 52.2% of the interviewees said they found some essay topics easier when they had the knowledge, 22.4% indicated that having the interest was important for them, 11.2% found data useful, and 5.2% found experience valuable, while 8.6% found something other than those listed above helpful. Again 2 people stated they were non-writers and all topics were equally impossible for them. Note that the data in some aspects changed significantly, especially with the Knowledge Subgroup (respectively from 36.2% and 44.6% to 52.2%). The Interest Subgroup stays at 22.4% with a modest increase compared with their explanations for the previous two questions.

Though this may be subject to discussion, as observed during the interviews, most of the interviewees, as the interview progressed, appeared to become more confident and comfortable when they gave their answers, and their answers gained clarity and some previously less logical answers became more logical. The final summary explanation, as stated previously, appears to be the most valid one and is therefore assumed to be the interviewee’s most accurate explanation as to why he or she found some essay topics easier or harder than other topics.

#### 4. Discussion

The analysis of the data generated from the 500 interviews clearly indicates that the majority of college students find some essay topics easier to write on than other topics depending on the knowledge they have. This confirms the findings of many studies that indicate examinees often choose topics of general knowledge rather than a highly specialized topic (e.g., Wang, 1996). In Wang’s words, essay topics perceived easier are chosen more frequently by student writers (1999). A recent study confirms from another perspective that topics generated from specific disciplines are perceived to be more difficult by students of other majors (Lee and Anderson, 2007; also cf. Graham et al., 2006). By the same token, examiners and markers also rely on their own knowledge. Cumming et al. confirm that “groups of raters with common professional or cultural backgrounds act in reference to certain norms and expectations, as has been shown in previous inquiry comparing the behaviors of differing groups of raters of ESL compositions” (2002:89). Also, students depend upon their knowledge of the discourse conventions of their fields of study to help them make decisions about how to revise their own essays (Mendonca & Johnson, 1994). Then comes the issue of *knowledge*, which is defined in almost as many ways as the number of dictionaries published and/or as the number of scholars who have defined it (e.g., Wallace, 2007; Alexander et al., 1996). While Alexander, Graham and Harris (1996), in particular, divide knowledge as “strategic knowledge” and “domain-specific knowledge,” college students who obviously lacked such terminology just mentioned the word *knowledge*, which, based on the interpretation of the explanations they gave, falls within the scope of the latter defined by Alexander et al. To the interviewees, as they clarified in the interviews, knowledge simply means knowing, understanding and being familiar with something which may be derived from

reading, learning, experience and other activities. Further discussion of controversial definitions of knowledge and other terms do not contribute to the focus of this study, and accordingly, the author takes the liberty to leave the rest of the key factors in the ambiguous way they have been used by the average college writer. In brief, the majority (52%) of the college students find that knowledge makes writing an achievable task.

On the other hand, the minority of the interviewees find interest, data and experience play an important role in making an essay topic writable. Avoiding the controversial issue of whether prior knowledge exists with interest or both are autonomous factors does not mean we should not attempt to find out the relationship between interest and knowledge. Indeed, Guthrie's opinion (1981) may easily be proven wrong, as shown in the author's interviews. In the post-interview chatting, an additional question was asked when four of the interviewees claimed that all topics were easy for them or when they insisted that interest was the only factor that made writing easy for them. (This information has not been tabulated, for it is not part of the survey.) Indeed, one who has an interest in a topic may possess prior knowledge of the topic, but equally true, one may be interested in a topic without knowing the topic. The answers of the following dialogue, provided by an interviewee, may shed light on the relationship between interest and knowledge.

Q: Are you interested in space science?

A: Yes.

Q: Are you able to write a good essay on the space shuttle?

A: No.

Q: Why not?

A: Because I know nothing about it, but I can do research or take a course.

Such simple answers as those in the preceding dialogue speak for themselves: interest does not equal prior knowledge, but neither are the two totally irrelevant factors in essay writing, as found in the study by Baldwin et al. (1985). The relationship between interest and knowledge seems to be one of common sense that may not necessarily require many a complex theory to explain. In many cases, interest just serves as a motivating force. As Angelicchio puts it, if students are genuinely interested in a topic, not only will they find the writing more enjoyable, but they will probably be motivated to write a more interesting paper (1989). The interviewees' responses confirm Angelicchio's opinion that interest is a motivating power that ultimately transforms the student's willingness and eagerness to learn to acquisition of knowledge, or new information and data needed for their writing. In other words, interest serves as the start point of education—from not knowing to knowing something. Needless to say, if college writers possess prior knowledge in a topic of interest, substantial learning may not be necessary, and, as it appears, neither is further discussion of the issue. In brief, it is self-apparent that interest on a topic will motivate the college writer to acquire new knowledge for essay writing, which makes writing easier in the final analysis (also see Rief, 2006).

As indicated in Table 4, 11% of the college students find the availability of data, which includes various forms of reference materials, makes an essay topic easier. This claim may be interpreted in more than one way. Firstly, it can be taken as a time saver. It is common sense that the availability of references and other support data simply means time saved for the writer who may otherwise research in the library or through other channels. Naturally, saving time means increasing the writer's efficiency or reducing his or her workload. Therefore the college writer has reason to believe that the availability of the necessary data makes essay writing easier. Their view is duly supported by classroom teachers in colleges and universities who hold that data collecting is a time-consuming activity (e.g., Huang, 1993).

Experience, though not necessarily a systematic body of knowledge, may be interpreted as personal knowledge. In their study on writing-to-learn activities, Reaves, Flowers and Jewell conclude that "[...] seniors, with more practical experience and a better understanding of course content, would be able to make more connections [...] in learning [...]" (1993:40). Dictionaries such as *Merriam-Webster Online* ([www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com)) and the *Oxford English Dictionary*, among others, consider experience as the source or basis of knowledge when they define the latter. For the majority of college students and undergraduates in university, expository essays are what they often write, and personal experience or anecdotal examples from personal life are often acceptable in their personal essays. Clearly, the nature of the expository essay appears to support the college writers' claim that experience makes writing easier.

To sum up the discussion, in the final analysis, the results of the survey that involves the 500 college students indicate that it is knowledge that appears to make essay writing easier. Experience may be considered as a form of knowledge in the broadest sense, while interest may serve as motivation for acquisition of new knowledge. Data, apparent sources of knowledge, provide student writers with certain information/support needed for their writing, which is or may be turned into knowledge. The author concludes that, linguistic skills aside, what the majority of the 500 college writers said is that whether an essay topic is easier or more difficult largely depends upon the writer's knowledge of the topic. That confirms the opinions of earlier studies, such as Kavaliauskiene's: knowledge of genre is a key element in all

communication and especially significant in writing academic or professional texts (2005; also see Englert et al., 1988; Clapham, C. 1996).

**5. Conclusion**

Freedman admits, “Very little is known about the process of evaluating students’ writing” (1979:328). Twenty-eight years later, Lee and Anderson find in their study that “the three topics [of a test, with writing being an integrated component] were not equivalent in terms of difficulty” (2007: 324). Conducted from the students’ perspective, this study confirms that an essay topic is easier for the majority of student writers if it falls within their scope of knowledge. For the minority, an essay topic is easier if they have the interest or the necessary data or experience. That prior knowledge makes one essay topic easier for college students than another finds theoretical support in various studies which discover that a specific topic assigned in a test or examination may affect the examinee’s writing performance due to various factors including subject knowledge (e.g., Lee & Anderson, 2007). The same study by Lee and Anderson points out that the matter of topic content of a writing test becomes even more problematic and important when measuring graduate students as the EPT [English placement test] does, because these students study in a variety of subject areas, with deeper knowledge in their own major (2007). Their study raises the questionability of the validity of essay topics that are assigned without avoiding such bias as that of knowledge, or writing topics provided by examiners unaware of the existence of such bias.

The college students’ confirmation of the researchers’ findings has significant implications in classroom teaching and testing of both first and second languages. In the delivery of the curriculum, when a teacher assigns an essay topic to the students, he or she has to be aware of not only the often discussed linguistic and cultural biases that may come with the topic, but has to weigh the priority of measuring the student’s writing skills through the essay or by testing their knowledge on the essay topic, or both. In light of the findings discussed above, though interest and knowledge including experience may be beyond control, examiners may provide appropriate essential and supplementary reading materials for examinees where data availability may be a questionable issue, especially when such materials are deemed capable of enriching examinees’ knowledge needed for the writing. This, beyond classroom teaching, also applies to institution enrolment testing, national college-entrance examinations and international testing, such as the TOEFL. The essay topics in question include those of any subject. It is hoped that this study will lead to improved validity of examinations across all disciplines at different levels, of which writing is the only, or one of the only components. Most importantly of all, the author hopes that it will minimize the number of victimized examinees whose representatives have generously participated in this study.

**Appendix. The Survey and the Primary Data**

*A. Survey on Essay Topic Writability*

- 1) Do you find some essay topics easier to write on than other essay topics?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ N/A \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Could you name a topic that is really easy for you?
- 3) Could you please explain why (the topic you have just given is easy for you)?
- 4) Could you name a topic that is very difficult or impossible for you to write on?
- 5) Could you please explain why (the topic is difficult/impossible for you)?
- 6) Could you please summarize again why (or why not) some essay topics are easier to write on than other essay topics?

*B. The Primary Data*

Table 1. College writers who find some essay topics easier than other topics

Some essay topics are easier	Yes		No		N/A		Total	
	Number	of	Number	of	Number	of	Number	of
Number of interviewees	452	90.40%	41	8.20%	7	1.40%	500	100%

Table 2. What makes an essay topic easier for college writers

What makes an essay topic easier	Yes		No		N/A		Total	
Knowledge	169	33.80%	12	2.40%	0	0.00%	<b>181</b>	36.20%
Interest	100	20.00%	6	1.20%	0	0.00%	<b>106</b>	21.20%
Data	52	10.40%	4	0.80%	0	0.00%	<b>56</b>	11.20%
Experience	79	15.80%	5	1.00%	1	0.20%	<b>85</b>	17.00%
Other	52	10.40%	14	2.80%	4	0.80%	<b>70</b>	14.00%
N/A: No writer	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	2	0.40%	<b>2</b>	0.40%
<b>Total</b>	<b>452</b>	<b>90.40%</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>8.20%</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1.40%</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Table 3. What is lacking that makes college essay writing more difficult

What is lacking that makes an essay topic harder	Yes		No		N/A		Total	
Knowledge	209	41.80%	14	2.80%	0	0.00%	<b>223</b>	44.60%
Interest	94	18.80%	4	0.80%	0	0.00%	<b>98</b>	19.60%
Data	54	10.80%	4	0.80%	3	0.60%	<b>61</b>	12.20%
Experience	49	9.80%	2	0.40%	0	0.00%	<b>51</b>	10.20%
Other	46	9.20%	17	3.40%	2	0.40%	<b>65</b>	13.00%
N/A: No writer	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	2	0.40%	<b>2</b>	0.40%
<b>Total</b>	<b>452</b>	<b>90.40%</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>8.20%</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1.40%</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Table 4. Summary responses to what makes college essay writing easier

What makes an essay topic easier: Summary responses	Yes		No		N/A		Total	
Knowledge	244	48.80%	15	3.00%	2	0.40%	<b>261</b>	52.20%
Interest	108	21.60%	4	0.80%	0	0.00%	<b>112</b>	22.40%
Data	49	9.80%	6	1.20%	1	0.20%	<b>56</b>	11.20%
Experience	25	5.00%	1	0.20%	0	0.00%	<b>26</b>	5.20%
Other	26	5.20%	15	3.00%	2	0.40%	<b>43</b>	8.60%
N/A: No writer	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	2	0.40%	<b>2</b>	0.40%
<b>Total</b>	<b>452</b>	<b>90.40%</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>8.20%</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1.40%</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

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## The Technological Diegesis in *The Great Gatsby*

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### Abstract

This paper explores the technological diegesis in *The Great Gatsby*. In the novel, Fitzgerald cleverly integrates the technological forces into his writing. He particularly relies on the two main props of automobile and telephone to arrange his fragmented plots into a whole. By the deliberate juxtaposition of men and women and machines and repeated appeal to the automobile as both carrier and destroyer and the telephone as both communicator and informer, the technological diegesis in the novel is fully established. Moreover, the technological forces in this particular novel are metaphorically constructed into the whole discourse of it.

**Keywords:** Technological diegesis, Automobile, Telephone, Metaphor

*The Great Gatsby* is a quintessential twentieth-century novel fraught with “the constant flicker” of the American scene. Nick Carraway the narrator, coming from the Middle West and selling bonds in New York, step by step unravels the story of his neighbor Jay Gatsby, “whose mansion and fabulous entertainment are financed by bootlegging and other criminal activities (Hart & Leininger, 2005, p. 256).” On one hand, the protagonist Gatsby’s pursuit of an American Dream in the Roaring Twenties is wrapped up in the interrupted narration of the narrator Nick Carraway; on the other hand, the author’s mixed feeling of a marvel on and a dread for the new contrivances in science and technology is voiced by this same narrator as an omniscient observer of the fast developing world around him. Two parallel lines form on the same plot, yet the latter one and its relations with the former are often neglected by critics. Though the exceptional Guy Reynolds (1993, pp. v-xix) notes the mechanical forces in the novel, his concern about their contribution to the author’s fascination with American modernity fails to reveal the narratological unity underlying the two lines. In fact, the author has made the technological forces an integral part of the narration than fix them as a backdrop of it. The modern machines that undo as much as make the protagonists play a crucial role in linking everything in the story. With events and functions (characters) likened to or fixed into the discourse against the backdrop of modern machines, the whole novel forms a technological diegesis that has never before perceived in the previous American novels. Moreover, the technological forces in this particular novel are metaphorically constructed into the whole discourse of it.

The concept of diegesis here employed dates back to the distinction Plato makes between mimesis and diegesis (Harland, 2005, pp. 6-7). By technological diegesis we mean the diegesis as a narration of doings and sayings in *The Great Gatsby* is technologically conscious. First, the features of a new century are laid bare in the purposeful juxtaposition of “men and women and machines (Fitzgerald, 1993, p.37)” by the narrator Nick Carraway strolling the New York streets at night. Here in the danger of juxtaposition lies the author’s suspicious intention to materialize human beings. The comparison of Gatsby’s “heightened sensitivity to the promises of life (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 3)” to “one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 3)” may reinforce this impression on a reader of the novel. And then in Chapter Two, the narrator perceives “a machine in the kitchen which could extract the juice of two hundred oranges in half an hour if a little button was pressed two hundred times by a butler’s thumb (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 26)”. For twice, the author, for a purpose of aggravating the tension between humans and machines, withholds from the reader the superordinate words, i. e. “seismograph” and “juice extractor” that the author might have safely known. We are immediately alienated by a modern gadget when we marvel at a modern gadget, especially something whose name is even unknown to us. By the way, the destructive force of machines is to some extent trapped in the machine-gun forces Carraway and Gatsby have respectively commanded in the First World War.

The conflict between humans and machines in *The Great Gatsby* is mainly embodied in the narrator’s dread for a car that claims the lives of us and the urgency on a prompt answer to the ringing telephone. The two modern technological contrivances meet the requirement of a diegesis to place a story in a certain time and space or a time-space conglomeration. In the narration of *The Great Gatsby*, the automobile and telephone as two means of communications,

on one hand, contribute to the breaking down of space barrier; on the other hand bring with them the fragmentation of space experiences of human beings in modern times. The narrator in the story is constantly weighed down by the dread for a car accident, which is to finally bring the destruction of all protagonists, Gatsby and Mr. and Mrs. Wilson physically and Tom and Daisy spiritually. In the meanwhile, the story is constantly interrupted by the telephone that Gatsby has to answer and finally betrays his criminality. Moreover, “the narrative temporality that usually concerns order, duration and frequency of time (Martin, 2006, pp. 123-125)” in the story is also shaped by the two modern machines. Their technological forces can be exemplified by the frequencies of the telephones and automobile and related words appearing in the novel. To a novel of less than 50,000 words, the following frequencies are rather provoking to the eyes of a reader. See Table 1 for concrete figures.

Thus the diegesis of *The Great Gatsby* seems to be strongly structured on two communications tools, with their vehicle properties projected onto a machine-alienated society. The telephone that constantly fragments the narration and the automobile that stubbornly brings all to a certain place both serve the purpose of patching the piecemealed plots into one for the meticulous reader. With this literary technique of high modernity, the demand on the reader of Fitzgerald is raised to a level of conscientiousness. The narrator is no longer that type of Lockwood in *Wuthering Heights*. With Dick Carraway constantly taking the same car with the protagonists and finally “intercepting” a phone call informing him the criminality of Gatsby, the narrator has been perfectly arranged to know enough to tell the story by the author who superficially tries to hide some information from the reader at first.

In fact, the story in *The Great Gatsby* is essentially made possible by the explicit dichotomy between bad driver and good driver. This distinction determines the fate of two relationships, that between Gatsby and Daisy and that between Nick and Mona Baker. And the two dialogues between Mona Baker and Dick Carraway winds up the story about Gatsby from outside. Ironically, Gatsby as a good driver eventually shoulders the responsibility for a thankless bad driver that gets scot-free for her “misdemeanor”. With both the climax and ending of the story tied to a car accident, the distinction plays a crucial role in moralizing the narration of Nick Carraway. Here the morality of the two dialogues is projected onto the story about Gatsby and Daisy and that about Carraway and Baker. Gatsby as the scapegoat for a bad driver coincides with the permanent theme of redemption in the English literature. Baker’s insistence that “It takes two to make an accident (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 39)” turns out to be futile in her courtship to the narrator, for he has come to understand, “I’m five years too old to lie to myself and call it honor (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 113).”

With a girl (Mona Baker) whose name comprised of two car brands, the automobile is also cunningly constructed by Fitzgerald into the metaphorical discourse of the novel. And the girl whom the narrator half loves further hints at the uncontrollability of a bad driver. Tom is such a careless driver. “A week after I left Santa Barbara Tom ran into a wagon on the Ventura road one night, and ripped a front wheel off his car (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 50).” But he, together with his wife, never thinks of answering for what they have done. Just in one stroke of an accident, the hypocrisy of both Tom and Daisy is wholly unmasked to the public.

Though an earlier invention, the automobile has not been widely affordable until after the 1900s with the introduction of mass-production. Now when the narrator arrives in New York, the automobile becomes a must to a member from his class and above though he just owns a second-hand Dodge. All the protagonists in *The Great Gatsby* obtain the facility of driving a car or taking a taxi. The horse-drawn wagon has now been completely replaced by the automobile. But there arises the danger of driving a car with so many new drivers on the road. This phenomenon of the automobile as the carrier and destroyer that has been the concern of many people also arouses the interest of a novelist keen on observing the world and literary innovations. By repeatedly reporting a car accident, the author in his novel gradually aggravates the catastrophic atmosphere of the whole story and complicates the conceptualization of car as the carrier and destroyer. Here are some examples. “In the ditch beside the road, right side up, but violently shorn of one wheel, rested a new coupe which had left Gatsby’s drive not two minutes before (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 36).” The scene of a man defending himself for the accident caused by the real driver recapitulates and hints at the story of Gatsby shouldering responsibility for Daisy. And in the following case, “Snell was there three days before he went to the penitentiary, so drunk out on the gravel drive that Mrs. Ulysses Swett’s automobile ran over his right hand (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 40).” Moreover, in the two cases above, drunk driving is sensed by the author, especially during the Prohibition Period in the American history to corrupt people both physically and spiritually.

The types of car mentioned range from the commonplace to the coupe, limousine and station-wagon. “As we crossed Blackwell’s Island a limousine passed us, driven by a *white chauffeur*, in which sat three modish negroes, two bucks and a girl (my emphasis) (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 44).” The show-off of three negroes in a luxury car driven by a white driver reminds the reader of the racist remarks made by Tom earlier in the novel. Here the technological diegesis constructed against the technological advances in real world poses a question of how the novel depicts reality. The author sardonically voices his disbelief in the modernity represented by science and technology in the statement that Tom has got his racist ideology from some books founded on scientific investigations. What’s more, Mr. Wilson’s peculiar role of second-car dealer acts as the catalyst for the tragedy he brings to the protagonist. “The only car visible was the

dust-covered wreck of a Ford which crouched in a dim corner (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 17).” This Mr. Wilson that belongs to the ashheaps between the Long Island Sound and New York, inevitably represents and embodies the destructive forces lurking behind the modern wealth.

The car accident that in the end ruins all the protagonists in *The Great Gatsby* is further complicated by Tom’s insistence in Daisy taking the same car with Gatsby. The excuse he gives, if in a detective story, gives the semblance of having had in mind the car accident that will bring Gatsby to destruction. The fatality of a car accident is obviously metaphorized here as it is elsewhere in the novel. “They were gone, without a word, snapped out, made accidental, isolated, like ghosts, even from our pity (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 86).” And they are made accidental in an accident, one physically while the other spiritually, to repeat the above. Though the metaphorical use of this scene sounds like a platitude to a reader familiar with the stereotyped use of it a TV play or film, the fact that Fitzgerald most probably is the first writer to use such a scene in a major novel will make anyone excuse his “pitfall”.

The telephone plays no less important role in promoting the plot development than the automobile in *The Great Gatsby*. From the perspective of narratology, the telephone has been here given by the novelist as a walking stick to the narrator of his story. His intention of not baring the story of Gatsby once for all to the reader is consummately accomplished by this device of telephone that constantly breaks the continuum of his narration and observation. As the information from a phone call is withheld from the listener, the interruption has been deftly employed by the author to create the needed suspense and mystery in his novel about a tycoon with suspicious wealth. It delineates the necessary tension between the writing and its reader that Gatsby seems to be at any time and place wanted on the phone. Greatly influenced by Joseph Conrad, Fitzgerald dramatizes the modern techniques of his novel by appealing to the fragmented narrative. “When, almost immediately, the telephone rang inside and the butler left the porch Daisy seized upon the momentary interruption and leaned toward me (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 11).” Here the interruption of a telephone call gives Daisy the opportunity to communicate the secret about the butler’s nose to the narrator. And this is important to a novel that has purposefully adopted the limited point of view.

The telephone communications popularly adopted to convey information in the novel further help bring down the geographical barrier that used to separate the United States in the West and the East. Though the narrator ends the novel by emphasizing that “this has been a story of the West, after all--Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 112).” The communications within the country has become easier than ever before. It also makes possible for many business transactions between different cities to be carried out without the businessmen coming together. And in the story, the telephone as a communicator is also exemplified by the orders for a taxi and foods the protagonists make in the novel.

Despite the above facts, the author is more interested in the telephone call as an informer. So the telephone that now in the story conveys information to each other from different places, as mentioned above, acts as both a communicator (of good as well as bad news) and informer.

It can be fully reasoned out that the author has as much a disbelief in the telephone communication as he has in a car. The dread for the destructive forces that modern technology might bring to human beings underlies the whole story. The conveniences resulting from the technological advances have nothing to do with happiness. The talk over the phone sustains and betrays information at the same time. This is foretold in a scene that seems to have been otherwise unnecessary to include in the novel. “Almost at the moment when Mr. Gatsby identified himself, a butler hurried toward him with the information that Chicago was calling him on the wire (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 32).” Shortly after he revealed his identity to me, Gatsby was interrupted by a phone call from Chicago, indicating that the long distance call is popular now. And he was later interrupted by other long-distance calls from several places and finally after his death, his secret was revealed to the narrator by a phone call answered by him out of contingency (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 106).

The violation of telephone rules is also severe to the characters involved in a scandal or crime. First, there is a principle voiced by Miss Baker about when Myrtle could telephone Tom, “She (Myrtle Wilson) might have the decency not to telephone him at dinner time. Don’t you think (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 12)?” However, Myrtle will not listen. What a panic the telephone has had on everyone present? “The telephone rang inside, startlingly, and as Daisy shook her head decisively at Tom the subject of the stables, in fact all subjects, vanished into air. ...my own instinct was to telephone immediately for the police (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 12).” The telephone has for more than once exposed the secret to those from whom the receiver would like to hide. “The Great Gatsby sardonically notes the criminal usage of technology (Reynolds, 1993, p. x).” The geographical detachment of crime and criminals sharply demonstrates a modernity that may arouse the author’s further disbelief in the advantages of machines. However, the long distance has since become the mysterious signal usually associated with criminality in a prototyped scene in novels and films. In this story it is finally revealed by a mistaken phone call.

*The Great Gatsby* is usually regarded as a symbolic piece of literary writing about the American Dream. But what is often neglected by critics is that the symbolism in the novel is presented both in content and structure. The involved

narration as created by the incessant interruption of phone calls is itself metaphorically constructed to represent the broken American Dream. Thanks to the limited omniscience of the narrator and the telephone prop, Carraway is able to “deal(s) out the information in such a manner that he seems to withhold it first, thus creating a superb effect of mystery and suspense (Chang, 2003, p. 224).” And thanks to the advice of the narrator’s father, no comment is made by the author in the novel. He leaves everything for the reader to make a judgment of his or her own.

To sum up, *The Great Gatsby* demonstrates Fitzgerald’s high sensitivity to the new advances in science and technologies. By adopting a limited omniscient narrative, the author cleverly integrates the technological forces into his writing of this modern novel. He particularly relies on the two main props of automobile and telephone to arrange his fragmented plots into a whole. The car accident and the telephone betrayal have since been prototyped in the literary world. And by emphasizing the destructive forces of machines, the writer inadvertently touches upon the theme later to haunt other American writers, including Thomas Pynchon and others. By the deliberate juxtaposition of men and women and machines and repeated appeal to the automobile as both carrier and destroyer and the telephone as both communicator and informer, the technological diegesis is fully established to create a masterpiece of the world literature.

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Table 1. Frequencies of Telephone and Automobile and Related Words

Categories	Breakdowns	Times
Automobile	Car	88
	Motor (including motorcycle, motorboat, motor hearse)	10
	Automobile	7
	Drive (V. & N.) and driver	46
Telephone	Telephone and phone (V. & N.)	35
	Call up	11
	Receiver	5



## On Differences between General English Teaching and Business English Teaching

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### Abstract

With the accelerating rate of globalization, business exchanges are carried out cross the border, as a result there is a growing demand for talents professional both in English and Business. We can see that at present Business English courses are offered by many language schools in the aim of meeting the need for Business English talent. Many researchers argue that no differences can be defined between Business English teaching and General English teaching. However, this paper concludes that Business English is different from General English at least in such aspects as in the role of teacher, in course design, in teaching models, etc., thus different teaching methods should be applied in order to realize expected teaching goals.

**Keywords:** Business English, Globalization, ESP, Teaching methods, Teaching model course design

### 1. Introduction

With the growing demand for English courses tailored to specific needs, new ideas began to emerge in the study of language. Traditionally the aim of linguistics had been to describe the rules of English usage; however, the new studies shifted attention away from defining the formal features of language usage to discovering the ways in which language is actually used in real communication (Widdowson 1978). This phenomenon, along with the new developments in educational psychology, contributes to the rise of ESP (English for Specific Purposes). Business English is an area of ESP, and must be seen in the overall context of ESP, as it shares the important elements of needs analysis, syllabus design, course design, and materials selection and development which are common to all fields of work in ESP. However, Ellis and Johnson (2002) state:

‘Business English differs from other varieties of ESP in that it is often a mix of specific content (relating to a particular job area or industry), and general content (relating to general ability to communicate more effectively, especially in the business situations)’

There have been many developments in the ways in which teachers and course designers look at Business English. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, special vocabulary was considered as what distinguishes Business English (BE) from General English (GE). A second approach placed a greater emphasis on training “the skills of communication in English speaking, writing, listening and reading within a business context”. In the mid-1970s and 1980s, following the trends in GE, BE teaching began to focus more and more on functional areas-formulaic language for recommending, giving

opinions, showing agreement, and so on. During the 1980s the development of company training programs began to provide employees with opportunities to attend courses in presentation techniques, negotiating, and effective meetings skills, which led to the publication of books and materials on business skills.

In China, business English can be traced back to the earliest era of 1950s, when high education institutions started to set Foreign Trade English course which mainly included such core courses as electronic communication English, selected readings of the Western paper, and oral English of foreign trade etc. In 1990s, going along with the globalization of Chinese economy and the rapid increase of foreign trade volume, talents of business English had become increasingly popular. As a result, business English began to replace foreign trade English. For example, in Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, a new school called the School of English for Business specializing in teaching business English undergraduate and postgraduate programs was established with the integration of teachers from Faculty of English Language and Culture, School of Law, and School of International Trade and Economics. At present, BE is highly recognized in the society as one of the most popular disciplines. Statistics shows that the number of universities that offer major business English courses exceeds 800, and the majors and degrees are increasingly diversified.

Therefore, in line with the growing popularity of BE, it is of great significance to study on the difference between GE teaching and BE teaching.

## **2. Differences between GE teaching and BE teaching**

### *2.1 Differences in the Role of Teacher*

The role of language teacher has developed from a director and model in traditional language teaching to a facilitator in contemporary language teaching (Shulin Liu et al 2004). To a large extent, the function and the methodology or approach the teacher performs in different teaching activities determines the role of the teacher. Both GE and BE teacher should be able to identify the current language level of the learner and to select materials and set tasks that are appropriate in level as well as in context. They also need to be able to set course objectives and devise course program. In order to achieve this it is essential for the teacher to have an in-depth knowledge of the language system in terms of skills functions, structures and vocabulary.

Business English teacher, as a language teacher, should perform the basic functions required for a language teacher, specifically as organizer, assessor, prompter, participant, controller as well as knowledge-resource. However, to be a qualified Business English teacher more is needed. Swales (1985) prefers with some justification to use the term 'ESP practitioner' rather than 'ESP teacher' in order to reflect the difference for being a ESP teacher from being a GE teacher. In BE we tend to use the term BE trainer, because some BE trainers come from a business background, who have worked in companies themselves and have useful knowledge of the way in which companies are organized and run, and some may once be TEFL teachers, geologists or architects etc. Whatever the background, it is of great importance that the trainer should be seen as an expert in presenting and explaining the language, in diagnosing the learners' language problems, and in providing them with certain awareness of Business English.

Besides the qualifications and a background in business, a right balance of personal skills carries the same weight of importance. For a BE trainer, it is preferable to have an outgoing personality, to be interested in interaction with people of a wide variety. It is important for the trainer to establish his or her credibility and professionalism to be able to discuss with the learners about the course. Furthermore, BE trainers need to be curious about and interested in all aspects of business, because one of the best way for the trainers to unlock the learners motivation and learning potential is to show that he or she can relate to the questions of learner, such as how the companies work, the organization procedures, marketing strategies, financial planning, problem-solving, new technical developments and new products launching.

### *2.2 Differences in Course Design*

Course design is the process by which the raw data about a learning need is interpreted in order to produce an integrated series of teaching-learning experience, whose ultimate aim is to lead the learners to a particular state of knowledge. In general, the course design for GE focuses on subjects related to culture, literature, and linguistics, while that of BE focuses on courses related to the application of language in business communication. According to Hutchinson and Waters(2002), there are three main approaches to ESP course design, respectively called language-centered course design, skills-centered course design and learning-centered course design.

Language-centered course design, the simplest and most familiar one, aims to draw as direct connection as possible between the analyses of the target situation. It seems to be very logical, however, static and inflexible, only at the surface level.

Skills-centered course design has been widely used in a number of countries, especially in Latin America. This approach is founded on two fundamental principles, one theoretical, the other pragmatic. A skills-centered approach aims to get away from the surface performance data and look at the competence that underlies the performance.

Comparatively speaking, this approach claims to take the learners more into account than the language-centered approach.

Learning-centered approach, different from the first approach -- language-centered approach, in which the learner is discarded, and the skills-centered approach which doesn't take the learner into full account, gives the most concern to the learners, thus to maximize learning.

BE, as a kind of developed ESP, can undoubtedly adopt the way of course design for ESP. Based on what is talked above, the third approach --learning approach may be the best to assist in BE teaching activity, since it is most learner-centered, because BE learners usually have very clear demand for what to be learned, and some of them have set goals, especially the job-experienced learners. So it is important and necessary to take the students' practical need into consideration in BE teaching to make the learners benefit most from the class.

### 3. Differences in teaching models

Traditionally, teaching and learning was thought of as an "instructional paradigm" which the teacher as a dispenser of information in 45-or-50-minute lectures and the student as a passive receiver, container and repeater of the transmitted information. Teaching and learning was viewed as a linear process of information transfer and reception. For GE teaching, there are several teaching models frequently applied (Liu Yumei & Xiao Bang, 2007).

#### 3.1 PPP Model

PPP Model refers to the "presentation-practice-production" paradigm. At the Presentation stage, new grammatical structures are presented in meaningful contexts. At the Practice stage, learners are given a variety of practice tasks to reinforce what has been learnt. At the Production stage, learners are given practice tasks less controlled by the teacher to link what is newly learnt with what has been learnt before. In this model, the teacher plays a dominating role.

#### 3.2 ESA Model

ESA Model (J. Harmer,1998) refers to the "engage-study-activate" paradigm. During the Engage phase, the teacher tries to arouse the students' interest and engage their emotions. During the Study phase, activities are carried out to focus on language or information and how it is constructed. In the Activate stage, the exercises and activities are designed to get students to use the language as communicatively as they can. This model seems to place more stress upon the students' cognitive and affective factors such as interest, curiosity and attention.

#### 3.3 PPT Model

According to Ur(1996), the process of teaching a foreign language can be roughly broken down into three components: Presentation, Practice and Testing, as is called PPT Model. The function of the first and second stage of this model is more or less the same to PPP Model. In the third stage, a test may be designed to check what has been mastered and what still needs to be learned or reviewed.

In comparison, in BE teaching three different models are usually applied.

In the first model, BE is taught as a type of ESP, and a model of English for Occupational Purposes is adopted. This model starts with the students' need, and cultivates the students' basic ability, both in language and in behavior, required by the target business circumstance, for instance, in accountings, negotiations, marketing, business contract, etc.

The second model can be characterized as "content-based language instruction", which has been practiced in many European universities for BE teaching. Basically it has two stages. In the first stage, English is used as a tool to teach general business topics, such as enterprise, human resource management, stock exchange, international trade, economy theory etc. In the process, business communication skills training is offered, including how to write business correspondences and business memos. In the second stage, English international trade courses are offered, and the students are required to accomplish all these courses thus to gain the qualification to attend advanced seminar-oriented course of business.

The third model is a model of real-life situation planning, in which business material is adopted as the course content. The students are supposed to gain competence in the language used in those business communications. This model will be illustrated in detail in the following parts.

### 4. Differences in teaching skills

Traditionally, English is viewed as several components, called speaking, writing, listening, translation, and interpretation, and different teaching skills are applied in teaching each part. However, BE can not be treated in the same way, because BE learners are supposed to gain a comprehensive mastering of English required by business communications. It is hard to draw a line between the components, say, speaking, listening and writing, so traditional teaching skills may not be favorable in BE teaching. For this part focus is mainly placed on BE teaching skills, through which the difference between BE and GE teaching skills can be easily drawn.

Suggested by Ellis and Johnson (2002), basically there are two methods of planning the course in BE teaching. The first is to take each of the main performance areas and break it down into constituent parts: skills components, language functions and the grammatical and lexical constituents. The second is to analyze the language used taken from real life situations, or from simulations of real life situations. Different teaching skills are needed in accordance with different course content planning. The two methods can be illustrated respectively along with the teaching skills desired as follows.

#### *4.1 Breakdown planning and its teaching skills*

Breakdown method functions much similarly to the teaching method used in GE, as it stresses on language, and its grammatical components, but its skills components and the lexical components bear differences from GE. Due to the difference on lexical level, GE words are widely used in business with another meaning in BE. BE teacher should spend more time on this point to cultivate the basic skills for the learners and make the business meaning of the lexical components clear to the learners. For example, 'minute', in GE, means 'one sixth part of an hour, equal to 60 seconds' indicating the time, however, it means 'a brief summary or record of what is said and decided at a meeting' in BE, absolutely different from the GE meaning; 'round' means 'shaped like a circle or a ball' in GE, but '(of a meeting) in which the participants meet more or less as equals' in BE. The following table (see Table 1) gives more examples:

BE teachers are supposed to pick up these words which contain different meaning particularly used in BE, and make the learners aware of that difference. Besides the teacher may further organize a discussion based on a certain topic. For instance, regarding the word "minute" appearing in the text with special meaning in Business English usage, related questions, such as what should be done before, during and after a meeting, may be thrown to students to arouse their awareness of certain business practice, and the students also need to make a research into the process of a business meeting, and to simulate a business meeting in the class. The following is a list of the language functions relating to controlling a meeting (Ellis and Johnson, 2002):

- opening the meeting
- nominating topics for discussion
- rejecting topics
- asking people on the subject
- postponing a topic
- coming back to a topic
- referring to time
- summarizing, restating, or the rephrasing
- concluding
- closing the meeting.

In identifying the appropriate choice of expression for carrying out these functions, a key parameter will be formality versus informality (for example, 'I declare this meeting open'; 'Right, let's get started').

Thus, it is suggested that BE teachers should spend more time on these differences between GE and BE meanings in order to cultivate the basic skills for the learners and make the business meaning of the lexical components clear to the learners.

#### *4.2. Real-life situation planning and its teaching skills*

This method of planning the content of course, using the language used in samples taken from different real-life situations or simulations of them, is widely applied in BE content planning. As we notice, many BE books are compiled in this way, covering areas such as financing, foreign trading, payment, negotiation and so on, to show the characteristics of language used in different business situations. Real-life situation planning undoubtedly is a preferable way in BE teaching, because it gives the students the most direct impression on how BE language is different from GE language. This method helps the student manage BE usage better and faster. The following dialogue can best illustrate this point. (Chen Dan, et al 2007):

A: Let's talk about the mode of payment, ok?

B: Yes.

A: Do you accept D/P? For such a large amount, a L/C is costly.

B: Since the total amount is so big and the world monetary market is still rather unstable at the moment, we adhere to L/C.

A: In order to conclude the business, I hope you will meet me halfway. What about 50% by L/C and the balance by

D/P?

B: In view of our long friendly relations, we agree to your requirement this time, that is 50% by L/C at sight and the balance by D/P at sight.

A: Thank you for your close cooperation. And I sincerely hope that the volume of trade between us will be ever greater in future.

B: I hope so, too.

This is a typical businesslike dialogue, concerning the terms of payment in foreign trade. From the above dialogue, we can see that many special terms are used in the intercourse, such as *monetary market*, *volume of trade*, some of which are acronyms, such as *D/P*, *L/C*, and some of which are just GE words, yet containing special business meanings, such as *balance*, *halfway* and *at sight*. In a business communication it is quite common to encounter special terms concerning all the aspects of business.

Teaching this part, BE teachers had better get to know the procedures of the business concerned ahead of class, to help in teaching activity. Moreover, teachers are required to arouse learners' interest in and attention to the special usage of BE, and to encourage them to practice for the purpose of mastering BE.

### 5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, we know that the term BE is used to cover the English taught to a wide range of professional people, and people still in full-time education preparing for a business career and due to the special quality of BE, attention should not only be paid to language, but equally to the importance of skills-training in the teaching activity. This presents a tough challenge for BE teachers, as they are required to not only be professional in language, but also to develop awareness of the needs and concerns of business people and to become flexible enough to respond to those needs.

There is no 'best' methodology---any teaching situation is an interaction between the learner, the trainer and the activity itself. As a general rule, methodologies which put the learner at the center of the learning process are likely to be the most effective. In BE teaching activity, methodologies which combine language and real situation together discussed in this essay would be more favorable. Emphasis on the application of language in business communication can assist in the teacher carrying out the course more successfully and help the learners learn more quickly and more effectively---that can be a win-win policy.

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Table 1. Different meanings of the same word in GE and BE

Word	Meaning in GE	Meaning in BE
minute	one sixth part of an hour, equal to 60 seconds	a brief summary or record of what is said and decided at a meeting; make a mote of sth. in an official memo
round	shaped like a circle or a ball	(of a meeting) in which the participants meet more or less as equals
principal	person with the highest authority in an organization, esp in certain schools and colleges	(finance) money lent or invested on which interest is paid; capital sum
liquidate	pay or settle	close down (a business) and divide up the proceeds to pay its debts
portfolio	flat case for carrying loose papers, documents, drawings, etc	set of investments owned by a person, bank
composition	thing composed, eg a piece of music, a poem or a book	(of business) paying off debt, liquidating
disposal	action of getting rid of sth	deal with or sell a bankrupt company
turnover	face in another direction by rolling	amount of business done by company within a certain period of time rate at which workers leave a company, etc and are replaced
outstanding	exceptionally good; excellent	not yet paid, done, resolved, etc. , an ~ cheque
acquisition	action of acquiring	Action of taking over another company; merger and Acquisition (M&A)
draft	a rough written version of sth that is not in its final form	a written order to a party to pay money to sb
cove	to include	to protect sb against loss, injury, etc. by insurance



## Negotiated Interaction: A Way out of Cul-de-sac in Reading Classrooms

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### Abstract

This study aims to translate tenets of social constructivism into practice via a scaffolded modality of learning. It is hypothesized that hermeneutical nature of passage interpretation could create “affordances”, Van Lier’s (2000) term, or “interactional opportunities” which are psycholinguistically and developmentally valuable crucibles for “negotiated interaction” and subsequently enhancement of reading comprehension. To this end, 24 randomly-selected intermediate-level English learners, having been divided into two equal homogeneous scaffolded (experimental) and non-scaffolded (control) groups, were subjected to 15 half-an-hour reading activities. Whereas the non-scaffolded group proceeded individually, the scaffolded groups did reading tasks interactively; they read the passages for themselves, publicized their reading problems, discussed the difficulties with each other, and wrote a joint summary. On the 15th session a post-test (unseen texts) was administered. Pretest and posttest results were compared using Wilcoxon Match Pairs Signed Ranks Test, indicating that scaffolded reading enhanced the reading ability of the readers.

**Keywords:** Reading, Scaffolded Learning, Affordances, Hermeneutics, Social Constructivism

### 1. Introduction

According to Frehan (1999), the last four decades have witnessed the emergence of three reading models: “bottom-up” (data-driven) reading process, “top-down” or psycholinguistic approach to reading and the “interactive” approach. Although these models have facilitated the enterprise of language reading in one way or another, they have never been able to account for a plethora of the challenges and complexities associated with reading yet to be dealt with. These still-existing reading-associated difficulties and challenges in the reading pedagogy classrooms prompted us to approach the issue of reading and reading pedagogy from a fundamentally different perspective. We hope to propose a new way which may add to our enlightenment concerning reading pedagogy, and which may open a new page in further facilitation of the elaborate process of reading.

As a point of departure and within the conceptual framework of Thomas Kuhn (1970) it can be argued that along with other disciplines and fields of studies language studies have also undergone a sort of “paradigm shift.” The once-dominant paradigms of learning and teaching have been superseded with new outlooks and frames of reference. This paradigm shift has taken place as a result of the failure of the current scientific practices (in Kuhn’s terms “normal science”) in addressing and settling the ever-emerging questions and challenges of the world of language education. Such “paradigm shift” is basically rooted in a kind of epistemological metamorphosis (from transmissional to transformative) which the world of language studies have been subjected to in the past half of the last century.

The transmissional nature of knowledge (language, language teaching and learning) is corresponding to such an epistemological tendency which is deeply rooted in the tenets of positivism, modernism and objectivism, and holds that

the “knowledge,” supposedly declarative and propositional, is out there and it is the teacher’s responsibility to transfer this knowledge in the frame of a lecture to a learner.

Antithesis to the “transmissional” epistemological orientation is “transformative” outlook which is staunchly advocated by proponents of constructivism. This paradigm does assume some fundamentally different philosophical and epistemological underpinnings. Unlike the proponents of the transmissional nature of knowledge, the constructivists tend to believe in the transformative nature of learning, contending that people (co-)construct meaning through their interpretive interactions in their social environments. As a social constructivist Vygotsky (1978) argues that constructivism takes place “primarily” through social interaction rather than primarily within the individual. He further assumes that development of individual cognition is tied to one’s participation in conventionalized social activities. He argues that through such participation, novice members learn to acquire not only the appropriate activity-related behaviors but the goals that call forth such an activity as well (cited in Joan Kelly Hall, 1993).

The zone of proximal (potential) development perhaps is the best known concept of Vygotskian socio-cultural psychology. Vygotsky (1978, p.87) defined the ZPD as follows:

“The distance between a child’s[novice] actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers[expert].”

Now the question which might be raised here is “under what condition can a novice benefit from interactive activities”? In the framework of Vygotskian perspective, it is “under guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” that learners move from one lower level to a higher level. This guidance, collaboration or assistance is “scaffolding” in Vygotskian social interactionist constructivism. This assistance in the ZPD functions most effectively when it is tailored to the learner, adapted and eventually withdrawn in response to learner development (Lantolf and Aljaffareh, 1996). Donato (1994, p. 40) compares it to a “situation where a knowledgeable participant can create supportive conditions in which the novice can participate, and extend his or her current skills and knowledge to higher levels of competence.” Donato’s definition of scaffolding is unfortunately too much confined to “skills and knowledge.” Language development, in a sociocultural view, is the whole development of the human being; it covers much more than skills and knowledge. Nassaji and Swain (2000, p. 36) defines scaffolding, in a broader sense, as “the collaboration of both the learner and the expert operating within the learner’s ZPD.”

## 2. Social Constructivism and the Present Study

Vygotskian approaches to L2 learning have been gaining momentum in the field of L2 learning studies (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Donato & McCormick, 1994; Foley, 1991; Lantolf, 2000; 1994; Schinke-Llano, 1993). Indeed, this increase in the visibility of social constructivism and particularly a recent upsurge of interest in Vygotsky’s ideas have been the main propelling force behind our project. In this study, drawing upon the transformative epistemological orientation, we are to investigate the effectiveness of the amalgamation of the stated notions of Vygotsky and collaborative (cooperative) learning and teaching on reading enhancement of learners with reference to a typical English classroom in Iran. In a novel manner, we have attempted to generalize the Vygotskian principles which are normally applied to productive skills, to receptive skills, especially reading. It also goes without saying that Vygotskian approaches are well-known to employ scaffolded learning and Collaborative (cooperative) imperatives as presumably the practical instantiations of transformative epistemology.

Along with Bakhtin’s Dialogical view of language and Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, Van Lier (2000) likewise talks of “Affordances” or interactional opportunities. Also, Shotton and Newson (1982, cited in Van Lier, L., 2000, p.253) assert that:

“The environment is full of language that provides opportunities for learning to the active, participating learner. The interactional environment, in which the learners are engaged, is full of demands and requirements, opportunities and limitations, rejections and invitations, enablements and constraints \_ in short, affordances.”

We believe that such interactional opportunities are more likely to emerge in the scaffolded and collaborative reading design of our study. To our thinking, creation of such opportunities for interaction in collaborative reading classroom is originally rooted in the phenomenology of reading and subjectivities of the reader and author. It seems that the hermeneutical or diverse interpretation of the same passage on the part of various group readers, possessing a range of diverse personal characteristics including diverse values, assumptions, beliefs, rights, duties, obligations and in short, personal-reader factor, is a determining factor in the creation of these interactional opportunities; in the sense that the probable imperfection in understanding a text or diverse understanding of the passage, as Nuttall (1998) talks of non-totally of comprehension and Bakhtin (1986, cited in Thorne, S.L., 2000) talks of lack of “single universal truth due to differential positioning” ,on the part of various readers may possibly be a factor in the creation of a “bone of contention”, a “comprehension problem” or an “interactional opportunity” requiring to be addressed and resolved mutually or addressed through negotiated interaction. Indeed, these opportunities for interaction between the learners

create proper venues for the cross-fertilization and cross-enrichment of ideas and as Valsiner (1987, cited in Palincsar, 1998) assumes, these social transactions guarantee the “individual development.”

Based on what was stated above, this study aims to argue for the point that placing the learners in the conducive atmosphere of interaction and collaboration, which is abundantly replete with what Shotton and Newson (1982, cited in Van Lier, 2000) calls “demands and requirements”, “opportunities and limitations”, “rejections and invitations”, “enablements and constraints” ,and Van Lier’s (2000) calls “affordances” will more likely put the meaning-making process as well as developmental processes and subsequently language learning and reading processes in motion. Actually, being engaged into such collaboratively-designed reading activities allows the novices to be guided by experts.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Participants

The participants in this study were 24 unpaid volunteer intermediate-level students studying at R.R.4 level at Shokuh English Institute in Tabriz. The participants were between the ages of 16 and 22. The native languages represented included Persian and Azeri Turkish. To guarantee homogeneity between the scaffolded group (experimental) and non-scaffolded (control) group, a reading ability pre-test was administered to the population of 33. Based on the results of the pre-test the students were assigned to two homogeneous classrooms: 12 for scaffolded group and 12 for non-scaffolded group.

#### 3.2. Materials

Materials consisted of 15 intermediate English passages which were taken from the Interactions 2 reading book by Elaine Kim and Pamela Hartmann. The passages represented a wide variety of genres and students’ topics of interest. The materials were authentic and on general topics.

#### 3.3. Procedures

The participants were tested in their own classes as part of their regular classroom activities. The constructivist instructional design and collaborative learning underlie the design of the study. The researchers tried their utmost to incorporate the various aspects of constructivism and collaborative learning into the design of the study. The configuration of activities necessitated the cooperation among the readers. Skimming through the pertinent literature, we came across some theoretical notions which seemed to theoretically underlie the operationalized facet of our study. Writing (joint text summary) was widely utilized during the study to further engage the learners (readers) with the process of meaning negotiation and learning. The second typology of activities employed is supported by mounting evidence in the literature indicating that the use of “writing” along with “group discussions of problems” can enhance learning (cited in Tierney et al., 1989). Furthermore, Ur (1981, cited in Gabrielatos, 1992) states that in order for a discussion to be successful a purpose is needed. This purpose is manifested through a task which should involve “thinking”, “interaction”, “result” and “interest”. We did our best to incorporate the four parameters in our study. As for “thinking”, the students were asked to first read the passage by themselves and form an opinion as an individual (before within-group discussion). The formation of some ideas and opinions seemed to be the “result” of the activity because these ideas were to be used to convince the rest of the group of one’s choices and opinions and reach an intragroup consensus. Reaching such a consensus was guaranteed by means of “interaction” between the members. As far as “interest” was concerned, the topics of reading passages were decided based on their orally stated interests (during an informal discussion at an earlier point of the course) and on the teacher’s intuition of the learners’ topics of interest.

Following the above-mentioned theoretical basis, we conducted our constructivism-oriented study during the semester in 15 sessions as follows: The equal time limit of 30 minutes was allocated for the readers of both scaffolded and non-scaffolded groups. While the non-scaffolded group readers were subjected to the traditional individual reading, scaffolded group readers were exposed to a constructivist-interactive model of learning. The teacher divided the allotted time of 30 minutes for reading into two time span of 10 minutes and 20 minutes for both groups. The first 10 minutes were devoted to identical teaching conditions including pre-reading and while-reading activities in either of the groups. The classrooms first proceeded with pre-reading activities. During the pre-reading activities, some questions and topics pertinent to the title and content of the passage were raised to stimulate the prior knowledge of the learners. Not to mention that in the event of lack of relevant schemata, the teacher provided some relevant information to build new blocks of knowledge. Finishing the pre-reading phase of the reading process, the two groups entered the second phase of “While-reading” activities. During this stage the teacher had the readers embark on executing the two while-reading strategies of skimming and scanning. First, everybody skimmed through the passage and some students selectively provided the teacher with an overall picture of the whole text and then they scanned the text for some specific pieces of information and responses to some of the questions from the passage (scanning).

At the end of the first 10 minutes, the non-scaffolded group readers were given the free hand to proceed “individually” and read the passage as many times as they like and also utilize their own individualistic learning styles to deal with

the post-reading activities. However, the scaffolded group was divided into groups of three and the members were assigned the roles of “leader”, “spokesperson” and “secretary” on the rotating basis and instructed to follow the stages below:1) the “leader”, “spokesperson” and “secretary” of groups were asked to read the passage for themselves and take some notes of the problems they faced;2)afterwards the group members were asked to compare and contrast their understanding and problems with each other with the aim to settle the problems;3)the group readers were also asked to jot down the discussions’ key points;4)finally, they were prompted to jointly write a summary for the passage read and discussed.

The source of concern which was thought to be adversely affecting the implementation, evaluation and generalization procedures of the study was the probable lack of adequate motivation in doing reading activities in either of the groups, particularly the non-scaffolded group. In order to lessen the effect of this nuisance (lack of adequate motivation) as much as we could, the readers in both groups were notified that their class participation and performance during those 15 sessions would be of high significance and value in deciding their final scores. Unlike the previous semesters in which 30% of the final marks had come from class participation, in our classroom the percentages were altered in favor of our study. Notifying and winning the consent of the principal of the institute, the percentages were decided 60% and 40%, respectively for final examination and class participation. Observation of the readers’ diligence and checking out of the papers indicated that our *modus operandi* was a good guarantee. Actually, altering the percentages contributed to boosting motivation and interest in reading class.

As the treatment provision period came to an end, both groups were administered a post-test. In post-test the students were presented with identical passages (unseen texts) and they were asked to read the passages individually and answer reading comprehension questions.

#### 4. Results

Our basic results (descriptive values) are reported in Table1. In order to statistically analyze the data, the Non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was employed. It was preferred to t-test due to some factors such as smallness of the size of subject population deemed to be adversely affecting the generalizability of scores. For the pretest and posttest, the average comprehension scores for both Non-scaffolded and scaffolded groups increased as a result of reading activities performed during the semester. The non- scaffolded group’s gain of 0.34 points from the pretest to post test is not statistically significant using the Wilcoxon Match Pairs Signed Ranks Test:  $Z=-.924$  ,  $p>0.05$  (.356 $>0.05$ ). Thus, we may claim that results obtained or the reading proficiency enhancement could have occurred by chance. However, it is not the case with the scaffolded group because the scaffolded group’s gain of 1.75 from pretest to post test could not have occurred by chance  $Z=-2.616$ ,  $p<0.05$  (0.009 $<0.05$ ) and there is a statistically meaningful difference between the performance of learners in pretest and posttest.

#### 5. Discussion

This part is aimed at providing discussion and explanation for the results obtained above. The main purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the amalgamation of Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and tenets of collaborative learning in the enhancement of reading ability of the EFL learners in a typical English classroom in the context of English language pedagogy in Iran (Tabriz).The results obtained might be justified drawing upon some solid theories.

1. The postmodern sociocultural perspective as the cornerstone of this study has much to say and justify the results reached in this study. In the case of our study we might claim that the design of our study, albeit accidentally, let the readers with the lower ZPD be juxtaposed with those possessing higher ZPD, and this seems to be compatible with Vygotsky’s ideal condition of learning; a less proficient learner(novice) is juxtaposed with a more proficient learner(expert),and within the interactional opportunities coming up during reading activities the novices are scaffolded by the experts to solve a problem, carry out a task and consequently achieve a goal that would be beyond their unassisted efforts.

As the results revealed, the scaffolded group’s reading comprehension improved at the end of the semester. This improvement may be attributed to a host of factors, one of which might be “metatalk” during interactions. It is a well accepted fact among the advocates of sociocultural aspect of language teaching that “metatalk” can mediate language learning by enabling learners to achieve a deeper understanding of a linguistic feature and helping the process of internalization. Actually, metatalk arises when learners focus explicitly on language in the course of performing a task. A central claim of the collaborative dialogue investigated by Swain and her fellow researchers is that it involves language-related episodes where the participants talk about linguistic form as an object (cited in Ellis, 2004). This augmentation in linguistic competence attributable to the occurrence of explicit episodes of language (metatalk) can be one of the factors positively affecting the reading ability of the group readers.

2. Some scholars have linked Vygotsky’s social constructivism to cooperative learning. According to Newman and Holtzman (1993, cited in Jacobs, 2004), Vygotsky’s strategy was essentially a cooperative learning strategy. First and

foremost, in the framework of group working in collaborative learning students are further likely to develop a sense of autonomy and self-confidence in that students look to themselves for resources rather than relying solely on the teacher. Overcoming the problems as a result of intragroup cooperation and collaboration will make them believe in their hidden abilities and untapped potentialities. This synthetically injected motivation and self-confidence in the atmosphere of the classroom undoubtedly guarantees much perseverance and hard work of the members. Long and Porter in their review article (1985) argue for the pedagogical value of group work in language teaching: 1) Group work increases the amount and variety of language practice; 2) group work improves the quality of student talk; 3) group work help individualize instruction; 4) group work promotes a positive affective climate, and 5) group work motivates learners.

It is also a truism to say that in the interaction-based classrooms and collaboration-oriented settings time tends to be used more optimally in that several people are speaking simultaneously. Thus, exposure to language is intensified. However, in classrooms in which group activities are not used time is not utilized to the best advantage because activities are sequential and one person speaks at a time, usually a teacher. One of the reasons which may account for the results we reached might be the amount of exposure of the learners to interactive transactions of language.

3. Notwithstanding being fundamentally based on the tenets of social constructivism, the findings of this study do seem to be backed up by other existing EFL theories as well. Krashen's Input Hypothesis, Long's Interaction Hypothesis and Swain's Output Hypothesis are drawn upon here.

Krashen's (1987) Input Hypothesis posits that SLA is driven by comprehensible input. Jacobs (2004) believes that input from groupmates inside a group is more likely to be comprehensible. Putting Krashen's and Jacob's ideas together, we may argue for the existence of plentiful comprehensible input in verbal transactions of group members which for Krashen, seems to be the necessary and adequate condition for occurrence of acquisition and boosting language proficiency of the learners.

Building on Krashen's Input hypothesis and extending it, Long (1983, 1985) admitted that comprehensible input was a necessary condition for SLA. Long's Interaction Hypothesis regards Krashen's comprehensible input as a sine qua non for language learning, but not a sufficient factor. Interaction Hypothesis mostly tends to highlight the role of social interaction (negotiation of meaning) in increasing the amount of comprehensible input that students receive. This interaction includes students' asking for help when they do not understand input. The learners may resort to a variety of activities and strategies to "modify" the input to make it comprehensible to ensure that process of communication goes on. Raymond Brown (1991) includes prompts, confirmation checks, clarification requests, definition requests, repetitions, and rephrasings as the characteristics of "modification." The main point is that in negotiating meaning a piece of language that was not comprehensible before, now becomes comprehensible as a result of negotiation work and can thus be incorporated into the learner's target-language repertoire. Long (1996) in his updated version of the interaction hypothesis also suggests that second language interaction can facilitate development by providing opportunities for learners to receive comprehensible input and negative feedback, as well as to modify their own output, test hypotheses, and notice gaps in their interlanguage (cited in Mackey, A., 2002). Jacobs (2004) also argues that the collaborative setting in groups and the "positive interdependence" and trust among the groupmates make it more likely that students will have opportunities to repair comprehension breakdowns. Equal and symmetrical power relations between the group members likewise might be another factor in intensified engagement in language activities (Norton, B. & Toohey, K., 2001).

Also, it is expected that by assigning some figurative characters and roles in the groups, we might have alleviated the anxiety and psychological tensions generic in tutored settings or in Krashen's terms affective filters might have been lowered. It may be posited that by holding pseudocharacters of Leader, Spokesperson, and Secretary, the groupmates were further likely not to be afraid of making mistakes and consequently risk-taking was encouraged on their part. Creating such a warm and embracing atmosphere for learners in which students are willing to take the risk of exposing the language they know to the teacher and their classmates is one of the crucial responsibilities of an effective teacher. Juxtaposing the roles of "negotiation of meaning" and the encouraging atmosphere of our classroom for interaction among peers, we cannot help concluding that there was an abundant amount of interaction (opportunities for meaning negotiation) among the learners. Negotiated interaction and lowered affective filter are two important variables which our language activities must provide for. Schinke-Llano & Vicars (1993) state that condition that is both necessary and sufficient for successful L2 acquisition is that of negotiated interaction. By this they mean that L2 acquisition will not occur unless the learner is provided with ample opportunity to negotiate meaning in relevant and appropriate conversational exchanges.

In a seminal article, Swain (1985) argued that comprehensible input may not be sufficient for successful second language acquisition, but that "opportunities" for nonnative speakers to produce comprehensible output are also necessary. She claimed that understanding new forms is not enough and that learners must also be given the opportunity to produce them because "comprehension processes involve mainly semantic decoding, whereas production also involves syntactic processing" (cited in Bygate, M. 1988, p.77). She claimed that Comprehensible Output is the output

that extends the linguistic repertoire of the learner as he or she attempts to create precisely and appropriately the meaning desired. The sense of accountability and duty due to holding some roles and having the anxiety of being effective in the performance of the whole group on the one hand, and sense of “positive interdependence”, Jacob’s (2004) term, on the other hand presumably created a situation in which the students felt compelled to “produce” language and this is what Swain’s Comprehensible Output Hypothesis aims at. Raymond Brown (1991) has likewise indicated that doing tasks in the frame of small-group work is an important variable that can ensure the learner more opportunities to produce comprehensible output.

Indeed, Swain and other proponents of sociocultural perspective have argued that interaction in the framework of such collaborative dialogues is crucial for learning. For example, when a more expert interlocutor supports, or scaffolds, a learner socially, cognitively, and affectively during interaction, the learner is provided with the opportunity to develop not only her linguistic skills, but her cognitive and problem-solving abilities as well (Lantolf, 2000).

## 6. Conclusions

In this study, particularly the significance of incorporating “affordances” or “reading interactional opportunities” came to light. It was revealed that the “affordances” which seemingly emanate from hermeneutical and phenomenological dimension of interpretation in interactive reading activities provide the learners with pedagogically and developmentally excellent opportunities to co-construct meaning and knowledge through engagement in social interactions. Without doubt, the pedagogical value of the learning theories or learning atmospheres affiliated with “constructivism” is further appreciated and acknowledged in this study.

The findings of this study also give support to the idea advocated by some scholars like Swain and Lapkin (2001, cited in Ellis, 2004) that collaborative dialogues involve some language-related episodes where the participants talk about linguistic forms; these explicit language reflection episodes, “metatalk” episodes, mediate second language learning and solidify learners’ metalinguistic and linguistic knowledge by enabling them to achieve a deeper understanding of a linguistic feature and thus helping the process of internalization.

Despite the fact that we only addressed the notion of reading ability (reading comprehension) enhancement as the focal point of our study, it seems that such an interactive design does incidentally address other salient aspects of language phenomenon as well. In this regard, Joan Kelly Hall (1993) is of the opinion that active and frequent participation in the oral practices of group work leads to the development of sociocultural competence and the ability to use the resources to display and modify this competence. In fact, he sees active oral transactions in group activities as a microcosmic version of people’s continual engagement in their socioculturally framed face-to face everyday activities. Similarly, Donato & McCormick (1994) believe that the development of language learning strategies is mainly a by-product of mediation and socialization into a community of language learning community. They further assume that participation in this “community” is characterized by the learner’s ability to develop, reflect upon, and refine their own language learning strategies.

By the same token, Bygate (1987, cited in Gabrielatos, 1992) asserts that in the process of such activities students become aware of certain “communication strategies”; they also become cognizant of the reciprocal nature of oral interaction and certain features of “interaction routines”. Moreover, they become aware of the benefits of assuming joint responsibility for the negotiation of meaning.

As it was the case with our study, language was addressed holistically and without being broken down into constituent elements, such simultaneous multifaceted addressing of a language phenomenon apparently takes us to what Brown and other educationalists discuss under the rubric of integration of skills. In this respect Brown contends that reading will be developed best in association with writing, listening, and speaking activities, and “even in those courses that may be labeled ‘reading’ your goal will be best achieved by capitalizing on the interrelationship of skills especially the reading-writing connection” (Brown, 2001, p.298).

Equally, the results and findings of our project give much support to Doughty and Pica’s (1986, cited in Brown, 1991) findings that Two-way tasks are much favorable to SLA than one-way tasks. Two-way tasks are those in which both participants (in a dyad) and all participants (in a group) possess some but not all of the information, everyone also needs to get some information it was revealed that such tasks (two-way) tend to create a much real-life-like situation in which learning happens to the best advantage.

## 7. Implications

The findings of this study are noteworthy, since apparently no previously published research has shown that such an interactive and scaffolding-based model of reading have been applied in reading pedagogy classrooms to have enhanced EFL reading comprehension. Although researchers and practitioners have previously called for tapping into the untapped hidden treasure of interaction-based learning’s potentialities in order to as much facilitate the learning enterprise as possible, there seems not to be enough evidence suggesting that such models have been applied in reading classrooms. At its best, these models have been restricted to the enhancement of “productive” skills. However, the

results of this study indicated that the “receptive” skills, exclusively reading may benefit from the extrapolations of social constructivism. And although some EFL classroom reading teachers may have already incorporated such a model into their teaching methods’ repertoire, for the first time we seem to have tangible evidence that social constructivist reading model can yield a positive outcome.

Based on our observations and results of the study in a typical context of English language pedagogy in Iran (Tabriz) the following points might be implied:

1. It would seem appropriate that reading instruction be taught in the interaction-based context, where the readers are ingeniously guided and actively engaged in “doing” language in an integrated way because the integration of skills reinforces and interaction enriches learning.
2. Sustained interactive reading should be encouraged because it might be claimed that it well guarantees the development of autonomy, confidence, and better appreciation of reading and its relevant potentials on the part of learners.
3. Last but not least that with regard to the crucial role the sociocultural approach (negotiated interaction) played in the enhancement of reading ability of L2 learners in a typical English classroom in Iran, our educational policy-makers and material developers at the macro level, and teachers at the micro level are expected to join hands together to shed much light on the untapped potentialities of constructivism and to develop a sort of curriculum in which socioculturally-oriented collaborative materials and activities be an essential part. Hopefully, doing so will pave the way for the betterment of the language education and the efficient utilization of talents, finances and facilities.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

GROUP		Mean	Std. Deviation	N
PRETEST	1.00 Non-Scaffolded	14.4167	3.05877	12
	2.00 Scaffolded	14.3333	2.90245	12
	Total	14.3750	2.91641	24
POSTTEST	1.00 Non-Scaffolded	14.7500	3.25087	12
	2.00 Scaffolded	16.0833	1.92865	12
	Total	15.4167	2.70131	24



## An Exploration of Schema Theory in Intensive Reading

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### Abstract

Considering the difficulties in understanding the global meaning of texts, this paper intends to give some suggestions on how to help students reach a deeper understanding of texts in intensive reading classroom within the framework of schema theory. The purpose of this paper is expressed in three ways. The first is to give a brief overview of some of the literature that deals with schema theory as part of a reader centered psycholinguistic processing model for both native and non-native readers. The second goal is to show how familiarity with the subject matter in terms of schema theory affects L2 understanding about the text. The third one is to discuss the implications of schema theory in L2. The conclusion can be made that texts become easier to understand when the teacher enhances the students' prior knowledge. Background knowledge is a bridge connecting existing knowledge in mind with the new text. .

**Keywords:** Global meaning, Schema Theory, Intensive Reading

### 1. Introduction:

In traditional English teaching, new words and grammatical rules were regarded as the core of English learning. The students were only supposed to understand the words or sentence meaning rather than the overall meaning of a text. With the development of the society and the requirement of modern English teaching and learning, the general understanding of texts is becoming more important in the process of English teaching. What has affected their reading ability? Why do most readers have difficulties? How can language teachers help the students to improve their reading ability? The general knowledge of the world is of prime importance for the readers to have better understanding in the reading process. This paper mainly discusses these two aspects of reading in terms of the framework of schema theory and its application to the teaching of English intensive reading.

### 2. Literature Reviews

According to Goodman(1971), reading is a “psycholinguistic guessing game.” He thinks that in the reading process, the “reader reconstruct, as best as he can, a message which has been encoded by writer as a graphic display”. In 1979, Coady elaborated in this basic psycholinguistic model for reading and suggested a model in which the reader' s background knowledge interacts with conceptual abilities and process strategies to produce comprehension. Since then, a top-down approach has been used in second language reading. In the reading process, the reader is an active participant, making predictions and processing information. Background knowledge plays a significant role in promoting the reader to get information in the process. The role of background knowledge in language comprehension has been formalized as the Schema theory.

According to the Schema theory, a text only provides directions for listeners or readers as how they should retrieve or construct meaning of their own, namely acquired knowledge. This previously acquired knowledge is called the reader' s background knowledge. For the previously acquired knowledge structures are called Schema Theory.

An important aspect of cognitive science, Schema Theory is a theory of how knowledge is acquired, processed, and retrieved. Schema is the technical term used by cognitive scientists to describe how people process, organize, and store information in their heads. Schemas, or schemata, are seen as cognitive constructs by which we organize information in our long-term memory (Widdowson, 1983). They “reflect the experiences, conceptual understanding, attitudes, values, skills, and strategies ...[we] bring to a text situation”(Vacca & Vacca, 1999: 15). Schemata, therefore, have been called “the building blocks of cognition” (Rumelhart, 1982) because they represent elaborate networks of information that people use to make sense of new stimuli, events, and situations.

Schema theory is based on the belief that “every act of comprehension involves one’s knowledge of the world” (Anderson et al. 1977, cited in Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983: 73). Similarly, and more elaborately, Smith, (1994: 8) states that everything we know and believe is organized in a theory of what the world is like, a theory that is the basis of all our perceptions and understanding of the world, the root of all learning, the source of hopes and fears, motive and expectancies, reasoning and creativity. And this theory is all we have. If we make sense of the world at all, it is by interpreting our interactions with the world in the light of our theory. The theory is our shield against bewilderment.

The Schema theory thinks that comprehending a text is an interactive process between the reader's background knowledge and the text. Comprehension of the text requires the ability to relate the textual material to one's own knowledge. Comprehending words, sentences, and entire texts involves more than just relying on one's linguistic knowledge. As Anderson (1977) points out, “every act of comprehension involves one's knowledge of the world as well. Obviously, the more knowledge of the world one has, the better comprehension he gets about the text.

According to the Schema theory, the process of interpretation is guided by the principle that input is mapped against some existing schema and that all aspects of that schema must be compatible with the input information. This principle results in two basic models of information processing. Which are called bottom-up and top-down processing. Bottom-up processing is evoked by the incoming data and is also called data driven, because the data enters the system through the best-fitting, bottom level schemata. Top-down processing takes place as the system makes general predictions based on higher level, general schema, which means background knowledge in reading comprehension. In the Schema theory, skill in reading depends on the efficient interaction between linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world. Readers understand what they read because they are able to take the stimulus beyond its graphic representation and assign its membership to an appropriate group of concepts already stored in the memories. During the reading process, the reader brings information, knowledge, emotion, experience, and culture to the printed word to make decisions about what something "means".

From the schema theory, it is clear that meaning is not fully presented in a text passively waiting to be decoded by the reader. Meaning is reconstructed or created the reading process through the interaction of text and the reader's background knowledge. So what the teacher should do is to teach the students to link their prior knowledge with the text. By doing this the students can better understand the global meaning of the text.

### **3. Methods used in Language Teaching**

#### *3.1 Exploring Background Knowledge*

Taking the theories reviewed above into consideration, one can understand the importance of the role of prior knowledge in second language reading. The following methods may help the students to enlarge the background knowledge and link the prior knowledge to the text so as to direct them into a much deeper understanding of the text.

Pre-reading activities are some classroom activities related to the text before reading, including webbing, brainstorming, strip sentences, songs, role-play, predicting, initial discussion, guessing the title or the ending, word list of prediction, opinion poll and charts, etc. These activities don't tell the students anything that they can find out themselves by reading the text. Instead, they make the students want to read the text and help them to relate the text to his own experience, interests and aims. Take initial discussion for example, before explaining the text, the students are asked to discuss some topics related to the text in groups. By doing this, the students are guided into a situation where they may use language, which has not yet been taught. So they have to search for circumlocutions, to search the memory for items learnt long ago to express their ideas. This initial discussion will be an exchange of ideas. Focus will be on the meaning and students will take the initiative role of the class. In addition, this will allow a variety of interpretations of the passage because at this stage, the students have not been confined by the correct answer of the teacher's. They have more freedom to extend their fellow students' idea to develop their own thinking. Therefore, the students can get a chance to link the knowledge they have learnt before the text they are going to learn. And it also increases their motivation and gives them a more positive attitude towards the new text. The students will become eager to see what happens next and naturally bring their prior knowledge to the text. The usefulness of pre reading activities can be concluded in Brown's words (1993) “before you read, spend some time introducing a topic, encouraging skimming, scanning and activating schemata. Students can bring the best of their knowledge and skills to a text when they have been given a chance to ‘ease’ into the passage”.

#### *3.2 Enriching the Students' Background Information*

According to the schema theory, a text only provides directions for the readers as to how they should construct meaning from their background knowledge. Comprehending a text is an interactive process between the reader's background knowledge and the text, and efficient comprehension requires the ability to relate the textual material to one's own knowledge. If the students haven't enough relevant knowledge and comprehensible culture-based input to the text, they will fail to read and understand even the simplified text of a major field. As we know, language is the carrier of culture, but there are almost no such courses as Western Culture, Customs and Habits offered in most Chinese

universities for non-English majors. One possible way to help the students to a much deeper understanding is to enrich their background information. That is to say, teachers should select or develop appropriate materials for students to read in order to help them minimize cultural misunderstanding and interference and to maximize comprehension of reading materials. For instance, to introduce some common sense about western customs, habits, educational systems and so on. Present short and varied materials, which should never be so challenging, neither too difficult nor too simple, but always meaningful and rewarding and students can work out them through efforts. In this way students' prior knowledge is gradually built up, which will eventually facilitate reading in general. In the process of this kind of reading, students may feel frustrated now and then, but they can work through these reading materials successfully because of their variety and briefness. Students will find them interesting and exciting, because the repeated vocabulary of a particular topic or the particular style of a writer is presented to him continuously. According to the Schema Theory, when the schemata are repeatedly activated and further enlarged and refined and accommodated, one's reading comprehension will be greatly improved.

### 3.3 Analyzing the Structure of Texts

Ellis (1994) states that conscious rising directed at specific structure can result in subsequent noticing of these structures in input. And this noticing may help retention of the structures. Windonson(1983) also states that effective comprehension depends on the reader's ability to relate what is being read to a familiar pattern or schema. So different text patterns are gradually introduced to the students and taught them some features of different kinds of texts in order to develop competence in text patterns. A well-written text is often put in a logical pattern. Recognizing the pattern will enable students to better understand what they are reading. Therefore, the students are taught consciously how to organize and use their existing schemata in relation to a specific text and its content.

When students are taught the structure of text, they are helped to find some word clues because of the signals of certain patterns of texts, which may help students know when a certain pattern is being used. There are several groups of signal words and phrases such as "first"."second". "then" ."after" and" finally" signal an order to sequence of events, and words such as "how ever ". "but" ."otherwise" and "yet" signal the change of thoughts, which indicate a comparison pattern. Besides signal words, students can use other clues such as the title of a text, and topic sentence of a paragraph. For example, the title of a text usually gives the hint of what the author writes about, so the reader can predict the content and overall structure of a text. A topic sentence is one that introduces the central idea of a paragraph.

It is a very common practice to begin a paragraph with the topic sentence and then develop and explain it by giving supporting details and specific examples. By teaching the students to find the topic sentences of paragraphs and analyze the structure of the text, they can identify the central idea of a text easily. In addition to the above approaches, the students can distinguish facts from opinions in order to develop their reading comprehension skills.

## 4. Application of Schema theory in the process of text teaching

In the process of text teaching, the students will be directed to know how many sections the texts will be divided into. For instance, materials related to the text will be listed as follows:

- 1) About the author
- 2) About the background
- 3) About the words
- 4) About the explanation of the text
- 5) About the structure of the text
- 6) About the phrases in the text and exercises
- 7) About the useful sentences for writing
- 8) The deep meaning of the text
- 9) Writing
- 10) The implication of the text in English language teaching

These items are not taught separately, but related. The students, as any item is required to learn, are supposed to do something before text learning. In the process of Pre-reading, the first three items are required to learn about. The students will have to know some information about the author, his life, his living background, and the related information about the text. These activities mainly take place among the students or sometimes between the teacher and the students.

In the process of while-reading, which is the main process of learning the text. The teacher will explain the text basing on the global meaning of the text. After the explanation of the text, the students will be required to have a summary about the text and give the structure of the text. These actives mainly take place between the students and the students or

the students and the teacher. The structure of the text can train students to think orderly and logically. The teaching activities are students-centered. Everything taught in the classroom is related to the pre-reading process, which the students have learned before the text. That is, background knowledge (schema theory) plays an important role in text learning.

In the last step, that is post-reading process, the students will learn useful phrases in the text, which are the basic unit in writing. The students will write an article or an essay, using the phrases learned in the text. If necessary, the students are required to recite some paragraphs, which will be helpful in writing. Furthermore, the students will be required to express their ideas about the text, which will be useful in improving their speaking ability. In this way the students can be found how much they have understood the text (input) and how much they can speak out. (output).

It can be said that in the first step (pre-reading is self-learning, the students are doing input. In the second step (while-reading) is still input process, but the difference is while-reading is basing on the first step. It is a further understanding process in text learning. In the process of post-reading, it is completely an output process, which is shown in two ways, speaking and writing. In intensive reading, texts can be taught in this model.

## 5. Conclusion

As Hudson (1982) said the significance of background knowledge in the interpretation of texts by showing that schemata can override language proficiency as a factor in comprehension. The above training approaches are certainly helpful to enhance the students' prior knowledge and guide them to link their existing knowledge to the new world so as to reach a global understanding of the text. Background knowledge is also a bridge connecting input and output. It helps students to receive the new easily, and also promotes students to produce their thinking, which improves their comprehensive ability.

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## Developing CALL to Meet the Needs of Language Teaching and Learning

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### Abstract

This paper illustrates the advantages and disadvantages of CALL. It points out that CALL is influenced by traditional language teaching and learning approaches to some extent. It concludes that what is important in our university system is that CALL design and implementation should match the users' needs, since CALL is not always better than traditional language learning and teaching method.

**Keywords:** CALL, Traditional language learning and teaching, L2

### 1. Introduction

CALL stands for the acronym of Computer Assisted Language Learning. Levy (1997) defines CALL as "the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning". With the dramatic development of information technology, computers are widely used in various areas including language teaching and learning area. Much research has been done on the application of computers in language learning and teaching. Both traditional language learning and CALL have advantages and disadvantages. CALL is influenced by traditional language teaching and learning approaches to some extent. Although language teaching and learning approaches are different, but the goal is the same: to develop the learners' abilities as the same as native speakers. The aim of developing CALL is not to provide language with novelty, but is to improve the quality of language teaching (Cameron, 1989). It is important in colleges and university that CALL design and implementation should meet the needs of L2 learners. Because there is so much research involved in this area, we would describe CALL as a field in which it is difficult to become an expert. It requires a lot of knowledge from many different disciplines and areas, but I find that this makes the field itself more interesting, since there is always something different to investigate and research.

### 2. CALL and Traditional Language Learning

Language learning and teaching is a two-way communication. Traditionally, it needs fixed places and large amounts of papers and chalks. Traditional language teaching and learning is teacher centered, it is not flexible and students don't have their own autonomy. Large numbers of students are crowded in a classroom and black or white board make teachers busy although overhead projector makes things a little better.

For teaching and learning speaking and listening, Audiolingual method is the best choice, but for reading and writing, cognitive code and communicative are the priorities. But when developing a CALL system, things should be more flexible. I think CALL is not simply an open approach, neither a simple traditional closed approach. CALL should be more flexible to its learners, and it should be a mixture of closed and open approaches since it is a no-boundary classroom and the learners are different. CALL now includes highly interactive and communicative support for listening, speaking, reading and writing, including extensive use of multimedia CD-ROMs and the Internet.

#### 2.1 Advantages and disadvantages of CALL

CALL makes language learning and teaching flexible. Active videos, colourful pictures and graphs make learners exciting and not bored of it. But there are some constraints on the practice of CALL as well, such as learners' lack of technical competence, poor interaction among learners, etc. Table 1 shows some advantages and disadvantages of CALL.

There seems little doubt that CALL is presently the most innovative area in the practice of foreign or second language teaching and learning.

### 2.2 Differences between traditional language learning and CALL

Traditional language learning and teaching is also called classroom teaching. Knowledge about classroom language learning and teaching probably does not apply directly to CALL because of the different configuration of variables such as learners' and teachers' roles, location, and interactivity. As Figure 1 illustrates, the relationship between knowledge of classroom language teaching and CALL should be considered tentative. However, surely there must be some principles of L2 teaching and learning that derive from and contribute toward both the traditional method and CALL (Chapelle).

Huang and Liu (2000) point out that the student-computer communication is relatively new to students. The computer software and students do not communicate with each other by "words." Instead, students need to learn another communication system. The computers communicate by means of graphic presentation, sound effect, and animated characters. Students have to learn how to communicate with the computer so that they know what move they should make next. Also, the communicative activities are different. In a traditional classroom, the teacher provides the topic-specific situation for students to make use of language as much as they can. Since the traditional classroom is far from any similarities to the real life situation, the teacher has to tell students to use their imagination. Innovation in language teaching and learning technology, especially those, like CALL, which offer challenges not only to the established roles of teachers and learners, the nature of materials and the organization of classrooms, but indeed to the language curriculum as a whole, need to be provided with an educational rationale. (Leech & Candlin, 1986).

### 2.3 Classification of CALL

CALL has been classified from many perspectives. Tim Johns (1990) offers a lively description of four approaches to computer assisted language teaching, each associated with a metaphor.

Syringe: injecting the learner with knowledge

Gymnasium: reflected in words like "drill" and "exercise"

Bath: which gives us the expression "total immersion" as a description of learning

Test tube: sees the learner as somebody who can discover rules by examining evidence.

What is the classification of CALL from the learners' and teachers' perspectives.

#### 2.3.1 From the learners' perspective

In 1977 a team of researchers at the University of East Anglia headed by Stephen Kemmis produced a report called "How Do Students Learn?" examining a large body of software in the sciences, geography and history. Kemmis's classification scheme divides the material into four classes that he called four paradigms: instructional, revelatory, conjectural, and emancipatory. I think this classification can be also used on CALL from students' perspective.

The instructional paradigm is essentially programmed learning. For this type of CALL, students are relatively passive when learning since everything is beforehand programmed. There are less two-way communications between learners and computer, and learners are navigated by the programs. This CALL is almost the same as tutor from teachers' perspective.

The revelatory paradigm includes activities where things are revealed gradually to learners through simulation or some kind of problem-solving activity. I would include text reconstruction under this heading.

The conjectural paradigm covers activities in which the learner explores in an unstructured way, tries to teach the computer, or writes programs to solve a problem. This type of CALL requires the learners to have some basic knowledge of computer technology. It is quite like a tutee from teachers' perspective.

The emancipatory paradigm refers to the use of computers purely as tools, e.g. for word-processing or on-line dictionary use.

#### 2.3.2 From the teachers' perspective

Littlewood (1981) sees the 'good teacher' as a knowledge source who presents the language material and offers explanations, leads practice, and finally tests. Traditionally, teachers choose also the method, offer opportunities for language use in relation to a particular topic or situation, control the syllabus (although in most cases this is dictated by the course book), and provide feedback e.g. through correction and testing. The introduction of computers in language teaching was initially expected to have an impact on the teacher's role, although this now seems likely to be a slow process.

From teacher's perspective, CALL can be classified as tutor, Socratic, tutee and tool.

### Tutor

The 'CALL as tutor' framework employs the computer programs as tutor of foreign language. In order for the computer to be a tutor of this matter, the computer would be programmed as an expert in language teaching. Like a traditional teacher, these programs could teach the students in that subject, evaluate the student's results, keep records of how the student is progressing, note the student's weaknesses and determine what exercise should be dealt with next. In theory, it sounds like an ideal situation and you might think that eventually computers will play a greater role in the classroom than the teacher. Two assumptions seem to be made for the tutor role. First, the teacher is not present, and second, that CALL work "is taking place in self-access mode outside the conventional classroom" (Levy, 1997).

### Socratic

Socratic is a teaching method, which prefers teaching by asking instead of by telling. Socratic method requires calling on students without giving them prior notice. The Socratic method encourages participants to reflect and think independently and critically. CALL programs are authored by means of question-and-answer drill. It is just like dialogue drill in language teaching classroom.

### Tutee

CALL as tutee places the emphasis on the learners being firmly in control, teaching the computer what to do rather than vice versa. In order to achieve this, the learner must have knowledge of an artificial language such as Visual Basic. To carry out a function the learner must enter a series of instructions in the machine.

### Tool

CALL can be presented as a tool. In this case, CALL is just like a learning tool and the learner is not controlled by any programs. This is a totally open teaching method. There are many CALL tools, and in this part, I will just look at four key CALL tools: video conferencing, email, CD, and WWW.

Video conferencing, in which participants can see each other and communicate with each other via TV cameras and a screen, is a typical synchronous activity: it is akin to a traditional classroom. Chen (1994) describes the stages and actions of video conferencing shown in table 2..

Video conferencing saves time. People in different places can communicate at the same time. But at present, this technology still has some disadvantages. First, this technology has not popularized. Only few organizations have this system. Second, the picture is not as clear as people expect. Further, due to the low speed of the net, sometimes the sound and picture can not be well matched.

E-mail is getting to be more and more common. E-mail shares the advantage with the telephone that it is quick, in that it is possible to get an almost immediate answer, but it is much cheaper than long-distance telephoning. An e-mail message can be delivered almost anywhere in the world in just a few minutes, and if the other person is at their computer, we can get a reply very quickly. Large amounts of information can easily be sent by e-mail. We can, for example, send an entire academic paper--or even an entire book, if we want to, though we may have to divide it up into several messages.

However, email has disadvantages as well. While in theory, we can get a reply to an e-mail message very quickly, this might not always happen in practice. Some people do not check their e-mail messages regularly, for example. If you do not receive an answer quickly, you will not know why. The message may not have been delivered, the other person may not have checked their e-mail, they may have decided not to answer, or it may take some time to get the information you want.

If you have an Internet connection and a program to read Web files (a "browser"), you can take advantage of this useful resource.

There are three main ways in which the Web can assist with teaching languages:

- Find resources which you can download / print and use with a class.
- Allow your students to find resources on their own or use specific materials on-line.
- Create your own Web pages / let your students create their own Web pages.

There are, of course, advantages and disadvantages to using the Web in all the above situations, but most of those who have taken the plunge have not regretted it. Clare Bradin, in her article "The Dark Side of the Web" (Bradin 1997), lists the following advantages and disadvantages to using the Web with students.

### Advantages:

- provides students with authentic language
- up-to-the-minute information

- real communication
- motivating
- relevant to content-based instruction

Disadvantages:

- World Wide Wait: Big files can be slow to load into memory. The wait time can be maddening for your students.
- Information glut: There is so much information that it may be too time-consuming to find the "good stuff." Even with search engines, it's still hard to find what you want.
- Some web sites are thin in substance.
- Users can get lost in cyberspace.

CD-ROM is a Compact Disk, which can contain amounts of information and is accessible in CD-ROM drive. It is suited for storing information requiring a huge amount of memory. CD-ROM is a good tool for language learning. It can be offline or online. Real English is a CD-ROM series for beginning level English learners. It would be appropriately used either as part of a traditional English course or for self-study. Lively videos, man/woman on the street interviews, the opportunity to practice speaking and listening, and a variety of good listening activities make the Real English CD-ROM series an excellent resource. The basic features are video, pronunciation, listening, watching, grammar presentation, voice recognition, etc. The relationship between teaching approach and CALL types can be illustrated by the table 3.

### 3. Conclusion

From the above discussion, we have learned that both traditional language learning and CALL have advantages and disadvantages. But using computers to assist language learning and teaching is the certainty and necessity of technological development. CALL has widely adopted around the world and it will become the major approach of language learning and teaching. However, CALL has not yet well been developed in colleges and University in China. Since CALL is not always better than traditional language learning and teaching method. How to develop CALL in colleges and university for English language learning and teaching to meet the needs of teachers and students? This question still needs further study. But what is important in our university system is that CALL design and implementation should match the users' needs, since CALL is not always better than traditional language learning and teaching method. So before designing the CALL system, we should have an investigation to the users including students and staff.

### Appendix

CALL: Computer Assisted Language Learning

WWW :The World Wide Web

CD-ROM : Compact-Disc-Read-Only-Memory.

L2: Second language

CAI: Computer Aid Instruction

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<http://www.extreme-learning.com/call> accessed on July 15, 2001.

Table 1. Advantages and disadvantages of CALL

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Learning Advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-paced or learner-centered.</li> <li>• An active process.</li> <li>• Available to language learner when he wants it.</li> <li>• CALL material is consistent within individual courses.</li> </ul> <p>Teaching Advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting to know the students' individual problems and successes with the learning material.</li> <li>• Working with a group of disciplined students.</li> <li>• Focusing on the important or more difficult material during class time or tutoring sessions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quite a few students feel they learn better when guided step by step through a concept. The student must be motivated and disciplined to complete a learning program on his own, without a teacher looking over his shoulder.</li> <li>• A good CALL program, as with all CBE programs, is very expensive to develop.</li> <li>• Development requires teacher input, but, a great number of teachers see programs such as CALL as replacement.</li> <li>• There is also a lack of suitable software available for CALL today.</li> </ul>

Table 2. Stages and actions of video conferencing

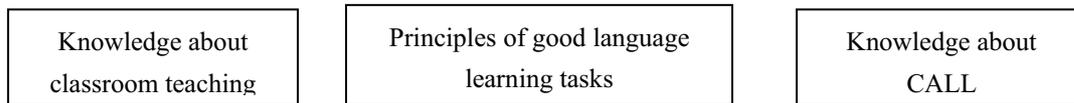
Stage	Actions
Pre-meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop statement of problem and goals</li> <li>• Decide on idea generation and consensus-building approach (brainstorm, delphi)</li> <li>• Develop background &amp; support materials</li> <li>• Prepare presentation</li> </ul>
Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In plenary state goals, give material, explain approach</li> <li>• Elicit ideas and capture them</li> <li>• Organize ideas and assess them</li> <li>• Present idea (best not plenary)</li> </ul>
Post-meeting	Review and cycle again

Table 3. Teaching approaches and CALL classification

Teaching approaches	Closed	Drill	Discovery	Open
CALL from teachers' perspective	Tutor	Socratic	Tutee	Tool
CALL from students' perspective	Instructional	Revelatory	Conjectural	Emancipatory



a. The tentative connection between classroom teaching and CALL



b. General principles connecting knowledge of classroom teaching and CALL

Figure 1. The relationship between classroom L2 teaching and CALL



## Discourse Markers in Composition Writings: The Case of Iranian Learners of English as a Foreign Language

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### Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate discourse markers in descriptive compositions of 90 Iranian students who were selected from two universities. Without any instruction, they were given a topic to write a descriptive composition per week for 8 weeks. 598 compositions were collected, and they were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively by three raters following Fraser's (1999) taxonomy of *Discourse Markers*. Findings showed that students employed discourse markers with different degrees of occurrence. Elaborative markers were the most frequently used, followed by inferential, contrastive, causative, and topic relating markers. There was a direct and positive relationship between the quality of the compositions and the number of well-functioned discourse markers. Results also revealed statistically significant differences between the use of discourse markers and composition quality in the groups. Graduate students used more discourse markers, and this led to more cohesive texts.

**Keywords:** Discourse marker, Cohesion, Contrastive marker, Inferential marker, Topic-relating marker

### 1. Introduction

According to Nunan (1991), writing is not only the process the writer uses to put words to paper but also the resulting product of that process. This process and product are also conditioned by the purpose and place of writing (its audience and genre). Writing in a second language is further complicated by issues of proficiency in the target language, first language literacy, and differences in culture and rhetorical approach to the text. Instruction in writing can effectively improve student proficiency in a number of key areas.

With the status of English as an international language and the expansion in the use of English, an increasing number of second language learners are engaged in academic pursuits that require them to write compositions. One interesting area of investigation in second language writing is to see how DMs are tackled by non-native writers of English in compositions. Theoretically, discourse markers (DMs) are a class of verbal and non-verbal devices which provide contextual coordination for ongoing talk (Schiffrin, 1987). They help writers provide writing which is effective and satisfactory.

Within the past fifteen years or so there has been an increasing interest in the theoretical status of discourse markers, focusing on what they are, what they mean, and what functions they manifest in texts. Fraser (1999) proposes that discourse markers are conjunctions, adverbs, and prepositional phrases that connect two sentences or clauses together. Redeker (1991) suggests that discourse markers link not only contiguous sentences, but the current sentence or utterance with its immediate context.

DMs have been investigated in classroom oral discourse (Hays, 1992), informal settings (Lee, 1999; Muller, 2004; Trillo, 2002), reading (Abdullah Zadeh, 2006; Jalilifar & Alipour, 2007), lectures (Dailey-O'Cain, 2000; Perez & Macia, 2002), academic genres (Abdi, 2002; Blagojevic, 2003; Bunton, 1999; Longo, 1994; Mauranen, 1993; Ventola & Mauranen, 1993), and student writings (Connor, 1984; Field & Yip, 1992; Intraprawat & Steffensen, 1995; Johns, 1984; Johnson, 1992; Karasi, 1994; Norment, 1994; Steffensen & Cheng, 1996). These studies have targeted their use patterns of frequency.

Johns (1984) analyzed English essays by tertiary-level teachers following Halliday and Hasan's (1976) model. In a similar study Connor (1984) compared six essays written by English native and ESL students, following Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework. Field and Yip (1992) compared 67 Hong Kong students with 29 Australian students writing on an argumentative topic. Johnson (1992) analyzed 20 expository essays in Malay, 20 essays in English by the same group of Malay students, and 20 essays in English by native speakers. Karasi (1994) analyzed 135 expository essays by Singapore secondary students. Norment (1994) studied 30 Chinese college students writing in Chinese and English on both expository and narrative topics following Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework. Intraprawat and Steffensen (1995) analyzed the DMs in persuasive essays by ESL university students. And Steffensen and Cheng (1996) analyzed texts written by students who worked on the propositional content of their essays and were taught using a process approach and students who concentrated on the pragmatic functions of DMs by enjoying direct teaching of DMs.

Results have shown that conjuncts were overused and lexical cohesion was moderately used by native speakers (Johns, 1984), that non-native students of English used more conjunctions than Australian students did, and they usually put all conjunctions at the beginning of the sentence (Field & Yip, 1992), that there was a difference between text types in the use of cohesive devices (Norment, 1994), that differences between essays that received good ratings and essays that received poor ratings were found in the number of words, T-units, and density of DMs (Intraprawat & Steffensen, 1995), and that students receiving direct instruction on DMs used them more effectively and also became more sensitive to their readers' needs thereby making global changes that improved their papers (Steffensen & Cheng, 1996).

The results of some studies were also contradictory. For example, while Connor (1984), Johnson (1992), and Karasi (1994) found no discrimination between native and ESL students in the frequency of ties, Norment (1994) discovered a correlation in the frequency of ties and the quality of writing. Results of the above studies, in general, suggest that language learners underutilize DMs (compared with native speaker use) especially for their pragmatic functions.

While several researchers have studied discourse markers from the descriptive and contrastive perspectives, to determine the role of DMs and language skills, still research needs to address these devices in relation to second language learners writing proficiency.

The present study reports on the use of discourse markers in academic compositions of Iranian university students at different levels of language proficiency. The research is based on the premise that the knowledge derived from this investigation will provide insights into the nature of the academic compositions of EFL university students. The investigation of the role of second language proficiency in second language writing ability continues to be revealing for the better understanding of the nature of second language writing. In order to examine the relation of discourse markers and composition writing of EFL students, the following questions were posed:

1. To what extent are DMs used in the compositions of students?
2. What is the relationship between the use of DMs and the composition writing experience of students?

## **2. Methodology**

### *2.1 Participants*

Participants in this study were 30 junior, 30 senior, and 30 MA students majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). The BA students were studying in Islamic Azad University of Masjid Soleyman and the MA students were studying in Ahvaz Center for Science and Research. Junior students had already passed three writing courses in basic writing and grammar and writing; senior students, with more writing experience, had also passed advanced writing; and MA students had passed National MA Entrance Examination which is a two-part test- a section on language teaching theories and another section on language proficiency that includes grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Besides, their MA courses required writing classroom papers. So they were expected to be more proficient in writing skills due to greater educational experience. The average age of the participants was 25.

### *2.2 Instruments*

This study made use of two instruments for the purpose of gathering data. Descriptive composition writing was assigned to students to write on the topics, selected by the researchers. The rationale for the selection of descriptive composition was that the students were more familiar with this kind of writing as describing places and events is a common practice in writing classes; therefore, we believed the effect of rhetorical structure on learners' performance in writing was minimized.

Fraser's (1990, 1999) taxonomy of discourse markers was chosen for classification on the ground that it conforms to written discourse and that it seems to be the most comprehensive classification in written discourse. Fraser's (1999) taxonomy includes three main subclasses. The first are contrastive markers that signal that the explicit interpretation of the second sentence contrasts with an interpretation of the first sentence. The second subcategory is elaborative markers that signal a quasi parallel relationship between the sentences. And the third subclass, inferential markers, signal that the following sentence is a conclusion derived from the preceding sentence.

Besides, Fraser (1999) distinguishes additional subclasses of discourse markers that specify that the following sentence provides a reason for the content presented in the previous sentence. (e.g., after all, because, for this /that reason, since). While Fraser's first class of DMs involves the relationship between aspects of the explicit message of the second segment and either an implicit or explicit message of the first segment, his second class of DMs are distinguished by focus on topic, and so he calls them topic relating markers.

### 2.3 Procedure

The experiment was conducted within 8 successive weeks. Without any instruction, each week the participants were given a topic on which to write compositions individually within an hour for eight weeks. The total number of compositions delivered to the researcher by junior, senior, and graduate students was 197, 190, and 211 respectively, (598 compositions overall). During and after writing they received no feedback. Then, to reduce the danger of subjectivity in analyzing the compositions and to increase the reliability of results, two other applied linguistics instructors analyzed twenty compositions and calculated the number and type of DMs. After discussing the tiny differences agreement was reached by the four raters accordingly. Next, the compositions were carefully scrutinized to determine the extent that DMs were functionally appropriate in the context of use.

### 3. Data Analysis

The first step the researchers took was to group the compositions, according to their proficiency scores, which were labeled as JC, SC, and GC for junior, senior, and graduate groups respectively. Then the proportion of DMs to the total words in all compositions for the three groups was manually calculated. Table 1 introduces the frequency and ratio of DMs in compositions written by the three groups.

Results showed that the subjects in this study employed a variety of DMs with some types used more frequently than others. Graduate students were considered the greatest users of DMs with the ratio of 33.77. Data revealed a positive relationship between educational experience and the rate of DMs use. That is, the more experience one in English is, the greater the frequency of DMs.

#### Insert Table 1 right here

The *Chi-Square* analysis was used to find out if the differences in the use of DMs between the groups were statistically significant. As shown in table 2, analysis revealed statistically significant differences between the groups in the use of DMs in their compositions at 0.05 level of significance (see Table 7).

#### Insert Table 2 right here

The statistically significant results acknowledged a direct relationship between the use of DMs and the composition writing experiences of the three groups. In order to be precise regarding the use of DMs, the frequency and percentage of the subcategories of DMs was also determined. As shown in Table 3, Elaborative markers were most frequently employed (73.21%), followed by inferential markers (13.04%), contrastive markers (8.83%), causative markers (4.44%), and topic relating markers (0.54%). This order was observed by all the groups. The extensive use of elaborative markers may be explained because descriptive writing in general requires elaboration of ideas which depends on the use of elaborative markers to signal the relationships between segments. Zhang (2000) reported a similar result in her study on cohesion extensive use, even overuse, of additive conjunctions such as *and*, *also*, *besides*, and *in addition*. One finding was that as the writing experience increased, the rate of DMs other than elaborative markers increased, but elaborative markers decreased. That is, there was a negative relationship between increase of composition writing ability and the use of elaborative DMs.

#### Insert Table 3 right here

#### 3.1 Analysis of Functions of DMs

A major objective of the study apart from the general description of the frequency of DMs was to investigate the relationship between the number of DMs employed and the quality of writing. To this end, the number of DMs used appropriately and inappropriately in terms of function was tallied in each group, as shown in tables below, and then the ratio of DMs was determined in order to find out which group used DMs more effectively and appropriately.

#### Insert Tables 4, 5, and 6 right here

The results revealed that students in the graduate group used DMs in their own places, and they were functionally appropriate in majority of cases.

The data revealed a close relationship between appropriate use of DMs and writing experience. That is, as writing experience increased, the number of well functioned DMs also increased. This shows that the graduate students had a better performance in using DMs, and consequently the quality of their compositions improved.

Having confirmed the direct relationship between DMs and the quality of composition writing through *Chi-Square* analysis, the researcher was also interested in finding out the strength of that association. To this end, two measures, Phi and Cramer's V were used.

Results confirmed a strong association between DMs and quality of composition writing, with the Phi value of 0.842 being close to perfect association.

#### **Insert Table 7 right here**

That is, there were statistically significant differences between the compositions in the use of well-functioned DM types, especially elaborative and inferential types. Those compositions with a larger number of elaborative and inferential DMs were regarded as functionally more appropriate.

#### **4. Discussion**

Results of the study found the use of discourse markers effective in enhancing the subjects' composition writing quality as the subjects in the graduate group performed far more successfully. This can be due to the fact that the participants in the graduate group were able to generate different kinds of discourse markers, develop the topic sentences, and support the main idea in light of the use of discourse markers, and that they could consciously draw on them while writing.

An important finding of the study was the statistically significant relationship between the quality of the compositions and the number of well functioned DMs used in the compositions. In other words, DMs, besides other textual characteristics, help identify good and poor writings, and more importantly, the quality is tapped by the use of well-functioned DMs. Thus, the larger the number of DMs in appropriate use, the higher the quality of the composition.

It was also found out that some DM types had a stronger influence on the quality of the compositions. Specifically, there were statistically significant differences between the compositions in the use of DMs types in the three groups. Those compositions with a larger number of elaborative and inferential DMs were considered good writings. Therefore, elaborative and inferential DMs are the most closely related to the descriptive composition quality, much less contrastive, causative, and topic relating DMs. Elaborative markers were also the most frequently used by all three groups indicating the importance of this type of DMs, both with respect to the number and the effect of this type of DMs on the composition quality. In general, it was observed that there were quite a large variety of DMs within good compositions and repetition of the same markers in the poor compositions with the exception of topic relating markers.

Compositions with more DMs were considered as more cohesive though DMs are by no means the only evidence for a well-organized and cohesive text. The writer's composition writing experience in the target language is also claimed to be a source of difference in the groups' writings, as results showed. More experienced students frequently used DMs in their right places. However, some students, especially the senior students, overused them probably to make their composition seem more acceptable. Note an example (S3) from this group:

*If you wanted to go to the hospital city like Isfahan I suggested you to go the Persia hotel located in the main street with good co-worker **and** as well as the waiters **and** waitress **and** with good prices. **And** at first you go downstairs **and** to enter the big **and** interested green halls **and** you confronted with **and** tall **and** fat man with stomach **and** wearing the strong glasses. There is in his habit that every one comes to his restaurant stand up with glory **and** honor **and** to say welcome with Isfahani accent" here you are" please take a seat **and** he also ordered to appear everything **or** dishes that you needed. I assure you that you have a good trip **and** joy of trip.*

Furthermore, graduate student writers seem to have an awareness of the needs of their readers and control the strategies for making their texts more considerate and reader friendly. And this is partly achieved through DMs. However, some graduate students compositions were linguistically appropriate even without the presence of DMs, and students compensated for this absence by generating relative clauses or short grammatical sentences. Composition (G7) is an example in which the student used short sentences as follows:

*My city, Tabriz, is very crowded during New Year. People from different cities come to this city. Everybody goes shopping. People buy new clothes. During New Year, children are very happy. There are light colors in streets. The streets are clean. There is special culture in my city. We go visiting our families. In New Year time, we give money to children as a gift.*

Another composition (G14) in which the student used relative clauses comes below:

*When I visited the Marshal Park in Aushrill, Tennesh, which is the southeastern of the US, I found that meaning of park is so much different with what I conjured before. It was so cramped with trees in which marvelous beauty was shining out of it. Then out there was actually like a non-stop feast we were treated unexpectedly.*

As genuinely shown by the above examples, where DMs were absent in compositions, they were compensated by generating relative clauses or short sentences, but their compositions were regarded cohesive. The result is probably

related to the limitation of the conception of DMs in predicting cohesion in all contexts since relative clauses can function as a way of elaborating on the previous clause.

Some good compositions with a larger variety of markers applied different kinds of elaborative DMs such as *moreover*, *to sum up*, etc. Note the example extracted from graduate group (G24):

*I live in a small town where I was born. **Although** this city is not so wide **and** developed, I like it a lot. As I mentioned it is my homeland. I can't consider particular place for illustrating it as the city center, **but** I think there is an intersection which looks like the city enter. **Because** it is a place where you can touch real beauty more than any where, this place has combine from people **and** nature. **More to the point**, you can touch novelty **and** freshness, as a part of nature honesty. **Above all**, the reason undoubtedly comes out of what have surrounded this city. **Besides**, you can visit different parts of it which have covered themselves by colorful veils of nature. **Moreover**, you can't camouflage your joy behind your face **because of** what you are confronting. **By the way**, you can just touch the spirit of freshness gently.*

More experienced writers seem to write more reader-oriented texts and use DMs as facilitating devices to make their text more comprehensible. So, students seem to need to accumulate more experience in writing compositions which brings self-awareness of DMs besides explicit instruction that they might receive in academic settings.

With most cases of overuse and misuse of discourse markers in junior group's composition, I follow Demirci and Kleiner (1997) who suggest that DMs are used in their writing as a result of translation from their first language to second language. Some of the students in this group wrote a text with excessive use of discourse markers which overshadowed the text and made it difficult to read; on the contrary, others wrote compositions without DMs. However, lack of these textual elements in their composition made the texts more difficult to read. These writers seemed too busy with constructing sentences to pay attention to the use of DMs which seem to require a deeper level of understanding. Note an example extracted from junior group (J15) with more misuse of DMs:

*I always go to a restaurant **and** it is restaurants my aunt. This restaurant is good **because of** it has skill cook **and** make delicious **and** jocular foods. My family **and** I go to this restaurant **and** we order kebab. The name of this restaurant is Venus. On their publicity advertising V word in Venus appear same spoon **and** fork. In my opinion a good restaurant should has beautiful outward appearance **and also** it has delicious **and** jocular foods **and** it has cheap price for customer **and** attract until that restaurant can advance .*

Kubota (1998) specifically found that insufficient L2 skills account for the lack of attention to organization, the use of simple text structures, ineffectiveness in connecting paragraphs, or inadequate paragraphing. Even though the students' classroom teachers may not directly teach discourse marker use, junior students may be modeling that use in the classroom, and they satisfy themselves with the idea that if they use too many DMs, they are making their composition more cohesive and acceptable.

Thornbury (1997, p. 126) reiterated that "Cohesion alone is not enough to make a text coherent". Texts have an internal logic, which the reader recognizes even without the aid of explicit cohesive devices. Students need to know that there are a number of other linguistic devices that affect the extent to which groups of sentences hold together and form a complete and cohesive text such as reference words (e.g. pronoun reference, article reference, ellipsis etc.), lexical sets, lexical repetition, as well as conjunctions. It is not sufficient to try to make ones' writing cohesive (or appear cohesive) by simply using a *sprinkling* of discourse markers.

Use of DMs appears to be as a last part of grammar. Traugott (1995, p. 37) defines grammaticalization as a process where by lexical material in highly constrained pragmatic and morpho-syntactic contexts becomes grammatical and already grammatical material becomes more grammatical. In her study she found out that development of DMs coincides with development of highly specific constructions via strategic use in discourse to a sequential adverbial and ultimately a DM. According to Fraser (1988, pp.21-23), DMs are part of grammar by carrying on the label of pragmatic markers, and then they should be somewhere between grammar and discourse and somewhere between cohesion and coherence. If they are considered as a last part of grammar where discourse comes to vogue, then they could be part of grammar and discourse. So grammar develops via pragmatic strengthening which ends up with the use of DMs; for this reason, the use of DMs demands experiential language learning.

To make an analogy, the relationship between grammar and discourse markers is like the relationship between train and rail. Coal is morphology, skeleton of train is syntax, chains that join the compartments together are semantics, waiters are vocabulary items, passengers are readers, the person who is leading the train is writer, and the rail is DMs. If all parts of train work well, then the train is able to move on the rail, and if the person who is leading the train knows the interpretation of signs along the rails, then he is able to keep the train on the right track.

Fraser (1988, p. 22) points out that the absence of DMs does not necessarily render a sentence ungrammatical and/or unintelligible. It does, however, remove a powerful clue about what commitment the speaker makes regarding the relationship between the current utterance and the prior discourse. As Lichtenberk (1991) said "Grammar shapes discourse, and discourse, in return, shapes grammars" (p. 78).

Junior students' failure to write appropriate compositions revealed that the lack of discourse markers strongly influenced the quality of compositions. So lack of DMs might entail incohesiveness of the passages, with connectors being a major part. Too, the incomprehensibility of some compositions arose as a result of the lack of discourse markers. Therefore, the immense magnitude of this incohesion made the compositions hard to comprehend for raters.

In the qualitative analysis, it was found that there was a difference in the use of the elaborative, contrastive, and topic relating DMs between the better writers and the weaker ones. The former in general tended to use a larger variety of markers in their compositions whereas the latter tended to repeat the same markers, and in the case of contrastive markers they were sometimes used without any explicit or implied contrast. Topic relating DMs were only present in the good compositions, namely higher group. Such findings seem to confirm the effect of these three discourse marker types on the composition quality obtained in the analysis of the data.

Excessive use of some DMs such as *and* sometimes makes the text dull which was especially observed in the junior group. Note the following example extracted from an elementary learner (J10):

*The center of city is very crowded **and** many people are very happy. In new year time **and** they have beginning the new year **and** to congratulate each other **and** they try to beginning the new year by effort **and** good future **and** also **in addition** to people to buy things new **in addition** to new year. **And** for this reason that new year wants things new.*

The above example shows that qualified written texts are tied more closely to the functionally appropriate use of DMs than grammar knowledge.

The group with more experience is hypothesized to write with more attention to audience needs, thereby making their text not only more effective in terms of using DMs in comparison to the other groups, but they also concentrate on the pragmatic function of DMs, which they use more skillfully than the other groups. They use DMs effectively to place emphasis on their belief about topic in order to progress the topic followed up by pack of supporting sentences which are hugging DMs as vessels which are leading the reader into the heart and body of the compositions. They use DMs effectively to catch their readers' attention besides progressing and developing their sentences, topics, and structure of paragraphs. Correct application of DMs in terms of occurrence, selection, and placement is like knowing how to create master painting, how to select the colors with regard to the impression they might have on people psychologically, and how to place it where everyone has perspectively good view of it.

McCutchen (2000) in his study showed that contrasting writing compositions of children at various ages with that of adults' learning to write is a developmental process which is influenced by the writer's available cognitive resources. The results of this study suggest that DMs seem to be acquired developmentally beginning with elaborative, followed by inferential, contrastive, causative, and topic relating in which some types are given priority over the others in relation to semantic weight, and because by applying *and*, *or*, and *also*, writers want to show their continuity. Elaborative markers are also more common in descriptive writing, but other DMs may be more concerned with articulation of social and cognitive relationship between reader and writer; for example, topic relating DMs have nothing to do with the continuation of the message like *by the way*, but they bring up another topic or relate it to another topic such as *speaking of x*.

One of the eye catching differences among the three groups was the degree of knowing when to omit discourse markers and knowing where DMs do not serve any useful purpose, and that we assume to be due to practice, reading, and one's level of experience in language. Metaphorically speaking, discourse markers are like pearl earrings of good texts; if they are decorated in their right way, which is why many readers want to put them on. On the whole, the construction of knowledge of DMs can take place accurately if learners are given the chance to work actively and continuously to recognize and use the effectiveness of the language for educational and individual purposes

My contention is that the distinction present between successful and less successful learners corresponds to the degree of flexibility that learners demonstrate when they select DMs, and when they utilize them appropriately. The use of DMs, which is found to be a discriminating factor in the quality of the student compositions, merits special and long-term attention. The results of this study calls for more attention to the significance of DMs in non-native speakers' composition writing.

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Table1. Distribution of DMs in all compositions

Group	Total number of compositions	Number of words	Number of DMs	Ratio of DMs per 1000
JG	197	19920	415	20.83
SG	190	25440	701	27.47
GG	211	31680	1070	33.77
Mean	199.3	25680	728	28.34
Total	598	77040	2184	82.07

JG: Junior Group

SG: Senior Group

GG: Graduate Group

Table 2. Chi-square tests

	DMS
Chi-Square(a,b)	8.067
Df	2
Asymp. Sig.	0.002

Asymp. Sig.: asymptotic significance

df: degree of freedom

Table 3. Frequency and percentage of types of DMs

Group Topic relation	Elaborative	Inferential	Contrastive	Causative
JG 0(0%)	323(77.83%)	47(11.32%)	30(7.225%)	15(3.61%)
SG 0(0%)	522(74.67%)	89(12.73%)	60(8.58%)	30(4.29%)
GG 12(1.12%)	754(70.46%)	149(13.92%)	103(9.62%)	52(4.85%)
Total 12(0.54%)	1599(73.21%)	285(13.04%)	193(8.83%)	97(4.44%)

Table 4. Functions of DMs in junior group

Function / Type	Elaborative	Inferential	contrastive	causative	Topic relation	Total
Malfunctioned DM	122	26	19	9	0	176
Well-functioned DM	201	21	11	6	0	239
Ratio of types of DMs	1.64	0.80	0.57	0.6	0	3.61

Table 5. Functions of DMs in senior group

Function / Type	Elaborative	Inferential	contrastive	causative	Topic relation	Total
Malfunctioned DM	57	24	21	14	0	116
Well-functioned DM	479	92	74	56	0	701
Ratio of types of DMs	8.15	1.45	1.85	1.14	0	12.59

Table 6. Functions of DMs in graduate group

Function / Type	Elaborative	Inferential	contrastive	causative	Topic relation	Total
Malfunctioned DM	22	18	11	11	5	67
Well-functioned DM	732	131	92	41	7	1003
Ratio of types of DMs	33.27	7.4	8.36	3.72	1.4	54.15

Table 7. Chi-square: Symmetric measures

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by	Phi	0.842	0.00
Nominal	Cramer's V	0.842	0.00
Valid Cases		598	

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.



## The Analysis of Cultural Gaps in Translation and Solutions

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### Abstract

This paper is about cultural gaps and their translation. It compares the different cultural connotations of expressions in English and Chinese. First, it analyzes the following cases which are often found in translation: cultural background; non-equivalence; extension and intension; derivation. Then six methods are put forward to solve those above problems.

**Keywords:** Culture background, Non-equivalence, Extension and intension, Derivation

### 1. Introduction

Translation, the act or process of rendering what is expressed in one language or set of symbols by means of another language or set of symbols. It has for centuries been taken for granted that translation takes place between languages. Undoubtedly, as an important communication way, one of the basic principles of translation is to be faithful to the original. According to this principle, translation should first be faithful to the content of original, with literal translation conveying the original cultural connotation in a precise way. Maybe cultural gaps are an obstacle when we do translation, but in my opinion, everything is translatable. Because translation is a “re-coding” or a change of surface structure in representation of the deep structure underlying it.

### 2. Cultural Gaps Reflected in Translating Process

We all know that each nationality has its own culture. It's the unique symbol of their mind. A society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves. In a word, culture refers to the entire way of life of a society. It includes not only material things such as cities, organizations, and schools, but also nonmaterial things such as ideas, customs, family patterns and languages. Language is not seen as an isolated phenomenon suspended in a vacuum but as an integral part of culture. Some social scientists consider it the keystone of culture. On the other hand, language is influenced and shaped by culture. It reflects culture. It just likes a bridge between culture and translation, so it plays a very important role in it.

As we know, during translating process, cultural differences often make us feel awkward. How can we deal with it properly? In my view, first of all we should see through to the essence of this circumstance. As the word is the most active and the most lively element of a language, the changes in social life and the development in national culture can be reflected in words quickly and directly. So we must pay more attention to the analysis and comparison of the cultural connotation of words for it reflects the cultural differences in different countries.

And these cultural gaps can be found in the following areas: cultural background, non-equivalence, extension and intention, and derivation.

#### 2.1 Cultural Background

When you are communicating with somebody from your own culture, you can express yourself or represent your experience much easier because you can share many similar ideas with him. But when communication is between people from different culture, the process is more troublesome. Words, as an effective tool, reflect author's attitude and beliefs, their points of view. And we can say, language expresses cultural reality.

So intercultural awareness becomes especially important. When you encounter a new language some things are easy to learn. You just patch on some new lexical items and grammatical forms and continue listening and talking. Other things are more difficult, though with a little effort the differences from one language to another can be bridged. Lack of cultural knowledge affects our comprehension negatively. Maybe someone thinks intercultural awareness can grow naturally, but I think it has to be trained. For example, when a child grow up in the American cultural world learns the words “dog”, he will normally learn the cultural meaning of the word: the dog is “man's best friend”, while a child brought up in the Chinese cultural world will be taught that the dog is a dirty and dangerous animal. These two kinds of

minds made us have extremely different attitude at a same animal. People, who naturally associated the culture with their mother tongue, are naturally inclined to interpret things with their own cultural references. This natural inclination is called “intuitive competence”.

A culture-specific phenomenon is thus one that is found to exist in a particular form or function in only one of the two cultures being compared. This doesn't mean that the phenomenon exists only in those particular cultures with another form. So in linguistic translation, it is important to be familiar with cultural background of the words.

In the famous work “A Dream of Red Mansion”, there is such occasion: Wang Xifeng and Baoyu hold a funeral procession, and Wang said to Baoyu :“*bie gei ta men hou zai ma shang.*” To show her shrewish and cordial vividly , David Hawkes translate this sentence into “you don't want to go clomping around the countryside like apes on horseback with those men”, which reappear Wang Xifeng's tone lively.

## 2.2 non—equivalence.

It is apparent, and has been for a very long time indeed, that the ideal of total equivalence is a chimera. Languages are different from each other; they are different in form having distinct codes and rules regulating the construction of grammatical stretches of language and these forms have different meanings. In translating one invariably looks for an equivalent word to render the original meaning in the target language, using the word “equivalence” in this context immediately bring the idea that identify the absolute corresponding equivalent words in two languages. But this is not the case.

### 2.2.1 A term in one language does not have a counterpart in another language

American Historian Henry Brooks told us “words are slippery”, he referred to the fact that language translation is difficult and subject to countless misinterpretations.

We often meet such circumstances in the course of translation: One thing is unique in one country, and the equivalent word reflecting this object can't be found in another country. Thus non-equivalence of words comes into being, and this illustrates cultural difference directly. For instance, we can't find equivalent Chinese term for “Sphinx's riddle”; on the other hand, “*xia lian san fu, dong lian san jiu*”, which means urging people to exercise and keep fit, is difficult to be translated into English.

To shift from one language to another is by definition, to alter the forms. Further, the contrasting forms convey meanings which cannot but fail to coincide totally; there is no absolute synonymy between words in the same language, so we can't be surprised to discover a lack of synonymy between languages.

In that case, we sometimes use “loanword”. When a word is adopted directly by one language from another, it is referred to as a loanword. Loanwords may retain a pronunciation similar to that of the original language. Such as some Chinese words: *ka fei* (coffee), *ji pu che* (jeep), *sha fa* (sofa) etc, they have become the basic vocabulary in our daily life and nobody would feel “an exotic atmosphere” when using these words.

### 2.2.2 Words or terms in both languages that appear to refer to the same object or concept on the surface actually refer to quite different things.

First, we take an example to illustrate it. For the Chinese, *ga li* only means to be a kind of condiments. But the curry in England refers to the chicken, meat, or other food stewed of curry, and it is generally mixed with rice, for it is both salted and peppery. So  $curry \neq ga li$ . Besides, there are many examples, about an object or concept that exists in one culture but not in another.

## 2.3 Extension and Intension

In different countries, when defining the same object, languages are different in extension and intension, which reflects cultural gaps, too.

### 2.3.1 Terms that have more or less the same primary meaning, but which have secondary or additional meanings that may differ considerably from each other.

We can see there are many color examples about it. In Chinese, blue implies pure and melancholy when it means salacious in English. And we find that we sometimes can't directly translate color words from one language to another without introducing subtle changes in meaning. The English phrase “red-blooded” doesn't mean “*hong xue de*”, rather, it is another way of saying that someone or their behavior is confident and strong. And the English phrase “red-blooded” just means “having red eyes (for lack of sleep)”, while the Chinese “equivalent” *hong yan* means at least two things: having red eyes, and interesting enough, “green” with envy.

### 2.3.2 Things or concepts that are represented by one or perhaps two terms in one language, but by many more terms in the other language.

In the broad sense, language is the symbolic representation of a person, and it compresses their historical and cultural

backgrounds as well as their ways of living and thinking. For instance, the word “brother-in-law” is often used in our daily life, and it can be applied to my sister’s husband, my husband’s brothers and my husband’s sisters’ husbands, which in Chinese we called “*mei fu*”, “*xiao shu zī*”, “*xiao jiu zī*” and so on, when perceiving all of these relatives in a similar way. Language is not simply a means of reporting experience but, more important, it is the way of defining experience.

#### 2.4 Derivation

Undoubtedly, culture is the forms of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating, and otherwise interpreting them. People often associate certain qualities with certain creatures or objects. These qualities often arouse certain reactions or emotions, although there may be little or even no scientific grounds for such association.

In the Chinese culture, the most-favored animals should be the dragon and phoenix. The dragon stands for the emperor when the phoenix stands for the empress. All the Chinese people regard themselves as descendants of the dragon. To English speaker, however, the dragon is often a symbol of evil, a fierce monster that destroys, and therefore must be destroyed. And the phoenix is by no means the spouse of a dragon; rather, it is associated with rebirth and resurrection.

The qualities that are associated, or the emotions that are aroused, are not always the same with different people.

The English word “daffodil” is often used to mean the spring and joy, (just like the “westwind”), as in Shakespeare’s sonnet:

When daffodils begin to peer,

With heigh, the doxy over the dale!

Why, then comes in the sweet o’ the year.

A deeper description of daffodils as the messenger of the spring can be found in William Wordsworth’s “The Daffodils”. Such an image of the daffodil being a symbol of the joyful spring time, however, is not popular in the Chinese literature. Conversely, a number of Chinese words with special images can hardly arise English-speaker’s any association.

Another best example is “A Dream of Red Mansion”. Undoubtedly the title may cause misunderstanding in American’s minds. For in their opinions, it means a person slept in a red room, which may cause their mysterious association. But conversely, it is not what the Chinese title means. David Hawkes’s translation of “The Story of the Stone( another original Chinese title) is even easier for the American who don’t have a solid foundation in ancient Chinese to understand the text. To this extent, it is a successful translation, for it is faithful to the original. However, to the Chinese, the title “A Dream of Red Mansion” can cause them unlimited association. This clearly illustrates cultural differences.

### 3. The method on how to solve above translating problems

For there are so many translating problems that be aroused by cultural gaps, how to deal with it is a very important process during translation. On the basis of his own translation practice Wang Zuoling stresses that in translating literature, one should emphasize the following three points: 1>. to translate the concept and convey the complete feeling of the original rather than just one word; 2>. to use different styles with different genres; and 3>. to pay more attention to the reader. That is, a translator should attach greater importance to cultural equivalence than to any other aspects. Obviously, equivalence can be achieved, but not always on the same level. We can choose suitable translation method from the following six procedures of establishing cultural equivalence. It is the key point of translating for it can affect the translation very much.

#### 3.1 Retain original cultural flavor

From the Jumptet’s principles of literary translation,, we study that “A translation should read like an original”. Whether to retain original cultural flavor depends on the literal form and inner meaning, which can be accepted by the reader.

We still cite the famous work “A Dream of Red Mansions” as the example.

*Daiyu dao: “die le deng zhi qian ne, hai shi die le ren zhi qian? Ni you chuan bu guan mu ji zi. Na deng long jiao ta men qian tou dian zhe: zhe ge you qing qiao you liang, yuan shi yu li zi ji na zhe de. ni shou li zi ji na zhe zhe ge, qi bu hao? ming er zai song lai, --jiu shi le shou ye shi you xian de, zen me hu ran you bian chu zhe “pou fu cang zhu” de pi qi lai!”* (Cao xue qin <hong lou meng>)

Daiyu said, “Which is more valuable, lamp or man? You’re not used to wearing pattens, so get them carry the horn lantern in front and take this one yourself, since it’s handy and bright and meant to be used in the rain. Wouldn’t that be better? You can send it back later. And even if you drop it, it won’t matter what’s come over you suddenly that you want to ‘cut open your stomach to hide a pearl?’” (translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang).

“pou fu cang zhu” is translated into “cut open your stomach to hide a pearl” in literal meaning directly. The metaphor “to save a little only to lose a lot” in the original text is extremely lifelike in the translated text, which is widely

accepted by the reader, and achieved the same effects as the English idiom “penny wise and pound foolish”.

Then let us read three translation way of the sentence “A one-eyed person is the King of the Blind Kingdom”:

A. *shan zhong wu lao hu, hou zi cheng dai wang;*

B. *shu zhong wu da jiang, liao hua chong xian feng;*

C. *mang ren guo li, du yan wei wang.*

In my opinion, the third one is the best answer. The first one is negative in Chinese culture, so it is no corresponding to the source language; let’s read the second one, I think many foreigners don’t know who Liao Hua is at all and somebody can’t understand this allusion which is quoted from “Three Kingdoms” unless he knows this book very much. Therefore, the third one is the fittest one for it retains the original meaning and flavor.

Let me show you another example: “when he dined with his sister that evening, Madeline helped herself to a cigarette from his pack on the table, and lit and smoked it inexpertly. Her defiant, self-satisfied, somewhat pathetic air made Warren laugh. “When the cat’s away, hey? He said.” *Ta gen ta mei mei na tian yi qi chi wan fan de shi hou, mei de lin cong zhuo shang ta de yan he li qu chu zhi xiang yan, dian le huo, bu tai zai hang de chou le qi lai. Ta na zhong jue jiang de, zi man de, you dian re ren lian ai de shen qi yin de hua lun haha da xiao. “mao bu zai le, hei!” ta shuo.* Here “When the cat’s away” is the abbreviation of the idiom “When the cat’s away, the mice will play”. The target language “*mao bu zai le*” keeps the abbreviation form of the original text, for the readers can understand the meaning according to the context: Warren and Madeline are sisters, when saying “When the cat’s away”, Warren just made a fun of his sister that she smoked furtively when their father is away. Other idioms such as “*da cao jing she*” (to stir up the grass and alert the snake) , “*xue zhong song tan*”(to send charcoal in snowy weather), “*hua she tian zu*” (to draw a snake and add feet to it) have the same result.

From above examples, we can feel “retain original cultural flavor” is a good and effective way. It can maximize the features of the original style. It always is used in translating classical novel and idioms and so on, especially there are a complete story and have special context or circumstance. But not all translation adopt this way because different problems need different way to solve.

### 3.2 Transliteration

Transliteration can be divided into two main aspects: transliteration and transliteration plus a generic word.

#### 3.2.1 Transliteration

Transliteration means words are translated according to the pronunciation, for instance, copy(*kao bei*), brandy(*bai lan di*), chocolate(*qiao ke li*), aspirin(*a si pi lin*); *ma jiang*(Mah--jong), *kong zi*(Confucius)etc. It often used to translate something unique in certain countries or areas, just like some food and games.

#### 3.2.2 Transliteration plus a generic word

Sometimes, Chinese readers may not understand the explicit meaning when using transliteration for they have no chance to know the thing directly, so we should plus a generic word after transliteration if necessary. Such word include Motor(*mo tuo che*), ballet(*ba lei wu*), beer(*pi jiu*), Hamburger(*han bao bao*), Pizza(*bi sa bing*), AIDs(*ai zi bing*). The plus generic word can help us to know these “new” things clearly so that we won’t make a joke.

Besides, transliteration and transliteration plus a generic word are used together such as Benz(*ben chi, ben chi che*), cigar(*xue jia, xue jia yan*)etc.

### 3.3 Transference

Because of some words are used widely in our daily life, maybe they are not original Chinese words we still can understand its meaning without translation. This method is called transference which means the original word is all transferred into the translated text wholly or partly. For instance: KTV, WTO, APEC, MTV, VCD etc.

### 3.4 Replace the cultural expressions of the source text with those of the target language

People in different regions use proverbs and sayings with their own distinct characteristics. Proverbs are short sayings of wisdom – of well-known maxims, truths or facts expressed succinctly and in a way that makes them easy to remember. And such method is most useful and helpful in translating proverbs. A large number of Chinese proverbs and sayings invariably display deep-rooted Chinese qualities. “*zhi ma kai hua jie jie gao*”(A sesame stalk puts forth blossoms notch by notch, higher and higher) is widely used by the Chinese people, who are familiar with or taught about the agriculture plant of sesame; “*lu yao zhi ma li, ri jiu jian ren xin*”(As a long road tests a horse’s strength, so a long task proves a person’s heart) “*chu sheng niu du bu pa hu*”(New-born calves make little of tigers) are also such examples.

These examples demonstrate the truth that people in different cultures do have the understanding of certain natural phenomena and social events. And they have a common wisdom with regard to many respects of life. This might

explain why people say, “Great minds think alike”, which in itself is a good example of the similarity in the two cultures.

### 3.5 Translate the implied meaning

Apparently, people in different cultures express words differently, because of difference of the mode of thinking. In that case, we should translate the implied meaning according to the context. For instance, “When I was in trouble, Paul was the only one who would stick his neck out to help me.” *Yi dan wo you le kun nan, bao luo shi wei yi yi ge gan mao feng xian lai bang zhu wo de ren.* “I’m going straight” *wo zai ye bu tou le (or, wo jue ding xi shou bu gan le).*

### 3.6 Explanation

To explain is another good way to solve cultural gaps’ problems. When translating certain words of the cultural flavor, there is no equivalent word in target language but only to explain. For example: Shylock refers to “*lin se gui*”, spring chicken “*nian qing de shao nv*”, go Dutch “*ge fu ge de qian*”, Don’t play uncle over me “*bu yao dui wo shua wei feng*”, keep one’s nose to the grindstone “*mai tou ku gan*” and so on. Another example “to carry coals to Newcastle ” is translated into “*yun mei dao niu ka si er, duo ci yi ju*”, which is clearly enough. Although, we have added “*duo ci yi ju*” to explain the metaphor in the sentence, the readers can’t understand the word “Newcastle”, we should illustrate that Newcastle is the centre of coals, carrying coals to that is superfluous.

## 4. Conclusion

The significance of translation is to transfer words and phrases from one language to another language. Briefly speaking, it is an art that retell the thought of author’s accurately with a complete different language from original. In the light of definition above, we know that the original meaning of expression should be kept in version in translation, no addition, no deletion. Therefore, there are two factors in translation: accuracy and expressivity. A good interpreter needs special, highly developed skills to achieve the goal of translation that is to convey the meaning and style of the original language. This means that he must be skilled in more than vocabulary. He must also know the word’s emotive aspects, as well as the culture’s thought processes.

In this article, we just probe into the cultural gaps and the way to deal with the translating problems in this field. And as far as the cultural value of language is concerned, this paper only touches upon part of it. Culture-related problems about this aspect are complicated and difficult, and besides the issues that we have mentioned in this article, there’re still lots of culture-related translation problems and methods, which leaves us much to learn.

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## The Impact of Strategies-based Instruction on Listening Comprehension

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### Abstract

This paper aims at providing some information concerning the impact of strategies-based instruction on listening comprehension. First the author briefly reviews some literature relating to this issue, and then focuses on a study conducted in English major at Jiangsu University of Science & Technology. This study is set out to examine the contribution that formal strategies-based instruction might offer learners to their improving listening proficiency. 44 senior students in English major, varying in performance in English learning (with the consideration of students' scores in TEM-4), are sampled. The Microsoft Excel is undertaken to analyze sample materials and data. Despite the limitation of the study, the final results indicate that strategies-based instruction plays a positive role in determining students' improvement in listening comprehension. The pedagogical implication of the study is that: if the instructors systematically introduce and reinforce strategies that can help students to improve listening competence and that are specially designed for any given test, their students may well improve the performance on language tasks. The study also seems to endorse the notion of integrating strategy training into the classroom instructional plan and embedding strategies into daily language tasks.

**Keywords:** Strategies-based instruction (SBI), Language learning strategies (LLS), Strategy inventory for language learning (SILL)

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 History of Language Learning Strategies Research

Language learning strategies (LLS) is a key issue in second and foreign language (L2 / FL) learning and teaching. The learner's expectancy on success and his or her positive values on learning tasks influence, but not guarantee intrinsically motivated deep learning. If the learner values the learning tasks but lacks skills / strategies to complete it, his or her high self-efficacy belief would not lead to competent performance.

Since the early 1970s research in the field of L2 learning and teaching has shifted from the method of teaching to learner characteristics and their possible influence on the process of acquiring a L2. Much research (Rubin: 1975, Naiman et al.: 1978, Huang: 1985) has been focused on ascertaining the characteristics of good learners and identifying their learning strategies to benefit underachievers. For the purpose of defining and categorizing LLS, considerable progress has been made in developing definition and taxonomies (Rubin: 1981, O'Malley et al.: 1985a, Oxford: 1990, Cohen: 1998). Many strategies training studies have been conducted, most of which have been proven successful (O'Malley et al.: 1985b, Oxford et al.: 1990, Cohen: 2000). Among various divisions of learning strategies, those by Chamot (1986) and Oxford (1990) are widely accepted, for example, cognitive strategies (strategies involved in analysing, synthesis, and internalising what has been learned, such as note taking, resourcing and elaboration), metacognitive strategies (the techniques in planning, monitoring and evaluating one's learning) and affect / social strategies (dealing with the ways learners interact or communicate with other speakers, native or non-native).

With the development of strategy study, Cohen (1998) further distinguishes language learning strategies and language use strategies. While language learning strategies include strategies for identifying the material to be learned, distinguishing it from others, grouping it for easier learning, committing the material to memory etc., the language use strategies include four subsets: retrieval, rehearsal, cover and communication strategies.

Cohen defines learning strategies as "learning processes which are consciously selected by the learner. The element of choice is important here because this is what gives a strategy its special character. These are also moves which the learner is at least partially aware of, even if full attention is not being given to them" (Cohen: 1990, qtd. in Cohen: 2000). Thus, language learning and language use strategies can be defined as those processes which are consciously selected by learners and which may result in action taken to enhance the learning or use of a L2 / FL, through the

storage, retention, recall, and application of information about the language.

In China, studies on English learning from learners' perspective have been increasing in the recent decade. Focusing on listening comprehension, what comes into our sight included Jiang Zukang (1994)'s "Learning strategies and their relationship to learning achievement in listening comprehension" and Wu Weiyang (2000)'s "Using learning strategies to develop listening comprehension - A case study", etc.

### *1.2 More Recent Strategies Research --- The Focus of Minnesota's SBI (strategies-based instruction) Experiment*

"The field of strategies training has received mixed reactions from professionals in the field, primarily because until recently there were few empirical studies that could be drawn on to demonstrate that, under certain conditions, such training had irrefutable benefits" (Cohen et al.: 1995, qtd. in Cohen: 2000). In response to these criticism, Cohen started an experiment consisting of 55 students enrolled in intermediate - level foreign language classes (of their own choosing - not randomly assigned) at the University of Minnesota, and then a research report came out entitled "The impact of a strategies-based instruction on speaking a foreign language". He defined SBI as "a learner-centred approach to teaching that extends classroom strategy training to indicate both explicit and implicit integration of strategies into the course content" (Weaver & Cohen: 1994, qtd. in Cohen: 2000). SBI has two major components: (1) students are explicitly taught how, when, and why strategies can be used to facilitate language learning and language use tasks, and (2) strategies are integrated into everyday class materials, and may be explicitly or implicitly embedded into the language tasks. "The component that makes it SBI is the added element of explicit (as well as implicit) integration of the training into the very fabric of the instructional program" (Weaver & Cohen: 1994, qtd. in Cohen: 2000). Much similarly to Cohen's SBI experiment but focusing on listening comprehension, this study attempts to answer the following questions: (1) What LLS are used by English major undergraduates (senior students) in Jiangsu University of Science & Technology?

(2) Whether there are gains in listening proficiency over 20 days SBI, and whether the SBI affects students' listening comprehension?

## **2. Research Design**

### *2.1 Sample*

The sample under study consisted of 44 senior students majored in English as subjects at Jiangsu University of Science & Technology. 7 subjects in the sample were self-chosen to participate in a case study as the experimental and comparison group.

### *2.2 Instrumentation*

The study instruments include a pre-test questionnaire, SBI, and a post-test examination consisting of two listening comprehensions abstracted from TOEFL Practice Test A & B.

The pre-test questionnaire contains 2 sections. Section 1 is on background information, which is intended to help researchers better understand the results of the survey in context, including name, class, sex, TEM-4 score, estimate time spent in studying English, self-evaluation in studying English, reasons for studying English, etc. Section 2 is the 50-item Strategy Inventory for Language Learning Version 7.0 (SILL) (Oxford: 1990), which was translated into Chinese to facilitate students' understanding. The 50-item, each having 5 choices, ranges from "the statement is never or almost never true of me" to "the statement is always or almost always true of me". Based on the SILL put forward by Oxford (1990), these 50 items belong to the following 6 categories: Memory strategies (9 items in Part A), Cognitive strategies (14 items in Part B), Compensation strategies in (6 items in Part C), Metacognitive strategies (9 items in Part D), affective strategies (6 items in Part E), and social strategies (6 items in Part F).

The post-test examination consisted of two listening comprehensions abstracted from TOEFL Practice Test A & B, each containing 50 multiple-choice questions. The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is used to evaluate the English proficiency of individuals whose native language is not English. It is composed entirely of multiple-choice questions with four possible answers per question. There are three sections in the test, each measuring a critical skill in the use of English. Listening Comprehension (Section One) contains recorded material that is similar to what you might hear if you were a group of North American students at a college or university. The language includes the vocabulary and idiomatic expressions common to spoken English, as well as the special grammatical construction used in speech. This section tests comprehension of both short and long conversations and talks.

### *2.3 Data Collection & Analysis Procedure*

First, 44 senior students in English major, varying in performance in English learning (with the consideration of students' scores in TEM-4), were sampled by filling out the SILL to identify their learning strategies.

Then, 7 of the sampled students were chosen to participate in a case study, all of which showed great interest. After taking TOEFL Practice Test A in the first week, students received the special-designed 20 days strategies-based

instructional treatment, and in the fifth week using TOEFL Practice Test B tested them as comparison. Both TOEFL Test A and B are taken in Section One only and are considered highly reliable.

Furthermore, students were interviewed by the author of this paper to examine the reactions to the previous strategies-based instruction and the specific strategies employed on the given TOEFL tasks. All the valid sample materials and data were collected and analysed by using Microsoft Excel.

### 3. Findings and Discussion

#### 3.1 Research Question 1: Frequencies for Strategy Use

The frequencies analysis provided us with the strategies frequently used and less frequently used by all the subjects. Table 1 presents the response frequency for each item in SILL. The average of individual strategy items ranged from a high of 4.02 (item30) to a low of 1.32 (item 6), while the overall mean of this sample was 2.819, indicating that they were medium strategy users in EFL (English as a foreign language) learning. [In examining strategy use on the five-point scale, three types of usage were identified as suggested by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995): high ( $\text{mean} \geq 3.5$ ), medium ( $2.5 < \text{mean} < 3.5$ ), and low ( $\text{mean} \leq 2.5$ )].

(Insert Table 1 here)

A close examination of the individual strategies (see Table 1) suggests that the most frequently used strategy is Compensation strategy [ $M=3.339$ ] (see Table 2), including: If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing (Item30:  $M=4.02$ ); I read English without looking up every new word in the dictionary (Item28:  $M=3.98$ ); To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses (Item25:  $M=3.50$ ); When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use body movement, or draw pictures (Item26:  $M=3.50$ ), etc. Some researchers also found that learners from Asian backgrounds prefer compensation strategies. Perhaps this is a characteristic of Asian students, trying to make up for their lack of knowledge by other means such as paraphrasing or guessing when learning a foreign language.

( Insert Table 2 here)

Although Memory strategies can be powerful contributors to language learning, in this study they were the least reported. For instance: I use flashcards to remember new English words (Item6:  $M=1.32$ ); I physically act out new English words (Item7:  $M=2.00$ ); I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign (Item9:  $M=2.09$ ); I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them (Item2:  $M=2.25$ ); I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word (Item3:  $M=2.30$ ), etc. This finding was consistent with those in Oxford & Nyikos (1989) and may indicate that beyond elementary levels of language learning, students simply do not use this strategy very much, or that students are not aware of how often they actually do employ Memory strategies (Oxford: 1990).

Other strategies of high frequency involve: I try to learn about the cultures of English speakers (Social:  $M=3.89$ ); I pay attention when someone is speaking English (Metacognitive:  $M=3.59$ ); I try not to translate word-for-word (Cognitive:  $M=3.55$ ), etc.

#### 3.2 Research Question 2: The Effects of SBI on Listening Proficiency

In response to the second research question, regarding the effects of SBI on listening proficiency, the results of the comparison analysis shows that TOEFL Practice Test B of all the 7 students have outperformed their TOEFL Practice Test A, further indicating that the 20 days SBI has a positive effect on students' listening comprehension. (See Table 3 & Figure 1)

(Insert Table 3 & Figure 1 here)

The author of this paper further interviewed these 7 students, finding that their reactions to the previous strategies-based instruction were very well. Student No.5, who got the biggest improvement, said that the SBI benefits a lot, especially some specific strategies employed on the given TOEFL tasks.

### 4. Conclusion

#### 4.1 Pedagogical Implications

The study was undertaken to determine whether SBI should have a role in affecting students' listening comprehension. It would seem that despite the limitation of the study, the results speak in favour of such a role.

Taking the frequency of students' strategies use in English major at Jiangsu University of Science & Technology, 5 out of the 6 categories of strategies fall into medium frequency with Memory strategies being the only group falling into low frequency of use; The author of this paper sensed the urgent need to promote students' awareness of employing more frequently these strategies during their English study. Preferably, if the instructors systematically introduce and

reinforce strategies that are specially designed for any given test and that can help students to improve their EFL proficiency, their students may well improve the performance on language tasks.

The study also endorses the notion of integrating strategy training into the classroom instructional plan and embedding strategies into daily language tasks unconsciously since strategies use has been frequently documented contributing to the success of L2 / FL learning.

#### 4.2 Limitations of the Study & Suggestions for Further Research

As with all studies of this magnitude, there are various limitations. In the first place, the SBI in this study was conducted for only 20 days. Secondly, with regard to the sample and statistical analysis, and especially those involving in the second research question --- the effects of SBI on listening proficiency, the somewhat limited size in this sample (too small) meant that certain kinds of investigation were impossible. For example, the author of this paper did not analyze the correlation between SBI and gains in listening comprehension test. Therefore, there is a need to conduct a similar but much larger study so as to be able to run analyses of correlation according to the factors such as changes in frequency of use of given strategies, SBI, gains in tasks performance and the proficiency level of the students.

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Table 1. Response Frequency for Each Strategy Item in SILL

No.	Item Description	1 <sup>1</sup>	2	3	4	5	M <sup>2</sup>
Part A : Memory Strategies							
1.	I think of connections between what I already know and new things I learn in English.	4.5 <sup>3</sup>	6.8	40.9	38.6	9.1	3.41
2.	I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.	25.0	36.4	29.5	6.8	2.3	2.25
3.	I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.	36.4	27.3	11.4	20.5	4.5	2.30
4.	I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.	13.6	27.3	36.4	22.7		2.80
5.	I use rhymes to remember new English words.	22.7	25.0	31.8	13.6	6.8	2.57
6.	I use flashcards to remember new English words.	70.5	27.3	2.3			1.32
7.	I physically act out new English words.	45.5	20.5	22.7	11.4		2.00
8.	I review English lessons often.	4.5	22.7	27.3	43.2	2.3	3.16
9.	I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.	40.9	22.7	22.7	13.6		2.09
Part B : Cognitive Strategies							
10.	I say or write new English words several times.	6.8	6.8	34.1	36.4	15.9	3.48
11.	I try to talk like native English speakers.	4.5	22.7	25.0	38.6	9.1	3.25
12.	I practice the sounds of English.	2.3	9.1	34.1	43.2	11.4	3.52
13.	I use the English words I know in different ways.	20.9	32.6	37.2	9.3		2.35
14.	I start conversations in English.	9.3	39.5	32.6	16.3	2.3	2.63
15.	I watch TV shows or movies in English.	2.3	15.9	31.8	45.5	4.5	3.34
16.	I read for pleasure in English.	6.8	25.0	43.2	22.7	2.3	2.89
17.	I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.	22.7	43.2	29.5	2.3	2.3	2.18
18.	I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly), then go back and read carefully.	22.7	25.0	13.6	29.5	9.1	2.77
19.	I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.	25.0	15.9	36.4	18.2	4.5	2.61
20.	I try to find patterns in English.	15.9	25.0	27.3	27.3	4.5	2.80
21.	I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.	18.2	22.7	29.5	18.2	11.4	2.82
22.	I try not to translate word-for-word.		13.6	31.8	40.9	13.6	3.55
23.	I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.	29.5	40.9	18.2	11.4		2.11
Part C : Compensation Strategies							
24.	To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.		15.9	31.8	38.6	13.6	3.50
25.	When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use body movement, or draw pictures.		15.9	31.8	38.6	13.6	3.50
26.	I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.	25.0	18.2	29.5	25.0	2.3	2.61
27.	I read English without looking up every new word in the dictionary.		6.8	9.1	63.6	20.5	3.98

28. I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.	27.9	23.3	27.9		20.9	2.42
29. If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.		7.0	14.0	48.8	30.2	4.02
Part D : Metacognitive Strategies						
30. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.	6.8	31.8	50.0	11.4		2.66
31. I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	4.5	15.9	47.7	27.3	4.5	3.11
32. I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	4.5		38.6	45.5	11.4	3.59
33. I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	4.5	6.8	31.8	43.2	13.6	3.55
34. I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.	25.6	34.9	25.6	11.6	2.3	2.3
35. I look for people I can talk to in English.	27.3	38.6	25.0	6.8	2.3	2.18
36. I try to read as much as possible in English.	7.0	27.9	41.9	18.6	4.7	2.86
37. I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	18.2	27.3	38.6	11.4	4.5	2.57
38. I think about my progress in learning English.	13.6	18.2	45.5	22.7		2.77
Part E : Affective Strategies						
39. I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.	4.5	13.6	29.5	38.6	13.6	3.43
40. I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making mistakes.	11.4	25.0	31.8	27.3	4.5	2.89
41. I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.	27.3	15.9	29.5	27.3		2.57
42. I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.	25.6	15.9	34.1	22.7		2.56
43. I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.	43.2	31.8	20.5	2.3	2.3	1.89
44. I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.	25.0	36.4	27.3	11.4		2.25
Part F : Social Strategies						
45. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.	6.8	15.9	20.5	45.5	11.4	3.39
46. I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.	22.7	31.8	29.5	9.1	6.8	2.45
47. I practice English with other students.	15.9	34.1	34.1	13.6	2.3	2.52
48. I ask for help from English speakers.	31.8	36.4	22.7	6.8	2.3	2.11
49. I ask questions in English.	11.4	36.4	36.4	13.6	2.3	2.59
50. I try to learn about the cultures of English speakers.		4.5	22.7	52.3	17.6	3.89

Note. <sup>1</sup> 1 = never or almost never true of me    <sup>2</sup> 2 = generally not true of me    <sup>3</sup> 3 = somewhat true of me    <sup>4</sup> 4 = generally true of me    <sup>5</sup> 5 = always or almost always true of me    <sup>2</sup> Mean    <sup>3</sup> Percentages

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the 6 Types of Learning Strategies

Strategy	No.	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Compensation	44	2.419	4.023	3.339	0.635
Cognitive	44	2.114	3.545	2.878	0.486
Metacognitive	44	2.182	3.591	2.844	0.678
Social	44	2.114	3.886	2.826	0.496
Affective	44	1.886	3.432	2.597	0.531
Memory	44	1.318	3.409	2.432	0.668

Table 3. Case Study

Case No.	Rank	Before SBI	After SBI	Gains
5	1	54 <sup>1</sup>	34 <sup>1</sup>	20 <sup>2</sup>
2	2	20	4	16
6	3	36	20	16
7	3	26	14	12
3	5	22	14	8
1	6	16	10	6
4	7	16	12	4

Note. <sup>1</sup> Rate of errors

<sup>2</sup> Percentages

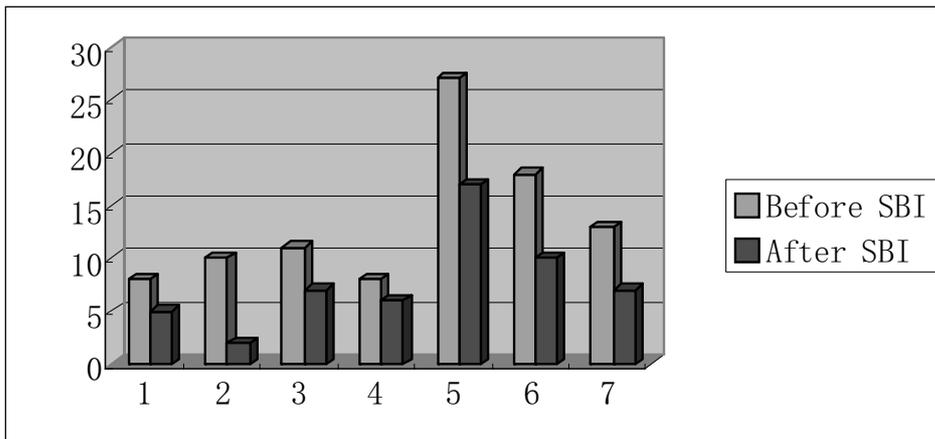


Figure 1. Case Study



## Technology-Enhanced EFL Syllabus Design and Materials Development

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### Abstract

In this paper, I am going to look at the issues of TESOL from one major critical point of view: How the use of the Internet technology might influence TESOL syllabus design and materials development. The article attempts to investigate some possibilities and opportunities provided by the Internet, focusing on the World Wide Web (WWW) as credible ways to access up-to-date and authentic language resources and materials for language teachers and learners of a foreign language. Besides, some challenges caused by the application of the new technology into language education for Vietnamese syllabus designers are addressed. Accordingly, the Vietnamese context is tentatively kept in view throughout these discussions. It is argued that technology can enhance the quality of syllabus design and material development, and that though the focus of problems and challenges is on the particular Vietnamese social setting, there is no reason in which the concerns considered cannot be shared in other relevant milieu.

**Keywords:** Internet technology, EFL, Syllabus design, Materials development

### 1. Introduction

We are now living in an era of booming information and technology, the influences and effects both positive and negative of which on education are obviously unavoidable. The traditional language classroom is slowly changing with the advances and increasing uses of technology. Internet-based and Internet-enhanced learning and teaching is now available in most secondary, vocational and tertiary educational institutions in many countries. Language teaching and learning via the Internet has experienced a remarkable increase in many parts of the world. To date, learning English through computer mediated instruction and becoming electronics literate through learning English is the trend in many foreign language learning and teaching programs. A thorough understanding of technology-enhanced learning processes is precisely essential for not only educators but language teachers as well. Hence, language specialists, by minimising potential challenges, need to capitalise on the advantages and strengths that this technology has to offer.

### 2. Pedagogical Characteristics of the Internet Technology

It is first of all necessary to examine the pedagogical characteristics and TESOL-related features of the Internet technology. As for learners, the Internet with predesigned automated systems first offers immediate feedback (Healey, 2001). Students do not have to hunt for an answer key or wait for the teacher to return marked assignments to know if they understood the material. Second, student learning can be individualized with the help of the Internet. Management systems in software automate the process of letting students proceed at their own pace through material (Warschauer & Whittaker, 2002). Third, multiple learning styles are more easily supported. Often, similar material is available in text, graphical, audio, and video format. All of these can be accessed in one place, on the computer, rather than having to bring in books, tapes, and VCRs. Another characteristic is that students are more motivated by using computers and talking live to others using state-of-the-art technology from email, chat, MUDs, MOOs, and WOOs to SMS, video conferencing (Kern, 2006), as well as recently wikis, blogs, and Web 2.0 as emerging technologies in language learning (Godwin-Jones, 2008). All of the positive aspects of technology create more both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for students. Besides, learning can be anytime and anywhere. The Internet does not close; people who have software and computers at home can work at their convenience. Last but not least, this is 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning style, preparing students for 21<sup>st</sup>-century jobs. As more jobs require knowledge of computers and the Internet, it makes sense for schools to be using technology in teaching and learning so students are very familiar with the technology when they enter the job market. For Warschauer (2004a), it is 15 years ago that the computer was considered just as a tool; it is not an end to itself but a means for learning English. English is nowadays not an end of itself; it is regarded as a tool for being able to use computer and get information on the Internet.

Li and Hart (2002) proposed two major pedagogical promises conferred by the Internet technology on teachers. First, more authentic material is easily available for language teaching and learning provided by the computer network technology as resource retrieval. Foreign language teachers do not need to wait for two weeks or more for the latest foreign language newspaper or magazine - today's issue is online now. What learners are looking at online is the same as what native speakers are reading online. In other words, the availability of authentic material, with up-to-the-minute information (Walker, Hewer, & Davies, 2008), is seen as the most obvious pedagogical advantage of the Internet technology. The Internet is a living thing. This means that there are endless possibilities for using it. The Internet has vast resources for language teachers, which can be accessed through various, and constantly improving search tools (Felix, 2005; Healey, 2001).

Conversely, the computer networks also offer various opportunities for the academic who wishes to mount pedagogical material via the Internet (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008). Teachers can, for example, create a personal home page - a focal point for students to come, detailing course times and changes, reading lists, and so on. They can also publish lecture notes and handouts or design courseware unique to web involving interaction and feedback (Walker et al., 2008). In many ways, this presents the pedagogical use of the Internet as it includes productive utilisation of HTML, DHTML and XML. Besides users-friendly Microsoft FrontPage, Macromedia Dreamweaver and Hot Potatoes <www.hotpotatoes.net>, teachers with advanced skills of computer technology can create high level interactivity in language learning using a variety of software, such as Tool Book <www.sumtotalsystems.com/toolbook>, Multimedia Builder <www.mediachance.com> and Question Tools <www.questiontools.com/>.

Second, constructivism and sociocognitive psychology which are brought to us by Piaget (1932), and later Krashen (1985) is facilitated by the Internet technology. Constructivist learning - the idea that teachers should offer data and hands-on experience for students so they can create meaning for themselves - is easier to design and set up electronically than using other media. Given these ideas about constructivism, experiential learning can be less demanding with electronic media because large amounts of data are available and students can easily build and revise electronically.

Furthermore, recent lines of inquiry incline to shift attention to the application of the internet technology into classroom practice from a sociocultural perspective as a theory of learning (Thorne, 2008b). From a sociocognitive angle (Vygotsky, 1981), language instruction has been regarded not only in terms of providing comprehensible input, but also in terms of helping students enter into the kinds of authentic social discourse situations and discourse communities that they would encounter outside the classroom. This interdisciplinary and socially informed approach sheds light on the role of social interaction in creating an environment to learn language, learn about language, and learn through language (Warschauer, 1997). The Internet, in this sense, provides alternative contexts for social interaction where learners can work with text or negotiate meaning with peers and teacher, facilitating access to existing discourse communities and the creation of new ones (Kern & Warschauer, 2000).

Syllabus design and materials development are mutually inclusive. While the syllabus defines the goals and objectives of a course, the instructional materials put flesh on the bones (Nunan, 1991). A particular syllabus formally consists of three very vital factors: the teacher, the students and the materials (Figure 1). The discussion below is about how the Internet technology affects and modifies the roles of these factors in the context of TESOL.

### **3. How does the Internet technology influence the EFL syllabus design?**

The Internet is believed to have much influence on foreign language syllabus design in the norm that it may change the roles of the teacher as well as the students (Harben, 2001; Larsen-Freeman & Freeman, 2008) so far as some of the authority and power is transferred to the learners. First of all, it can be seen that the roles of the teacher as provider of information and the student as receptacle thereof have shifted radically. The students, through their self-access internet facilities, have access to huge amounts of information and, unlike the teacher, have more free time to explore it. With the Internet, learners will be more independent as active shapers of the knowledge they obtain and the information they process. This supports one of the ten principles on ESL critical pedagogy (Table 1) by Crookes and Lehner (1998), stating that “[T]he purpose of education is to develop critical thinking by presenting students’ situation to them as a problem so that they can perceive, reflect, and act on it” (p. 321). The Internet can be tremendously liberating for both teacher and students, and therefore significantly affects the syllabus of a course.

Second, in many cases students are IT experts well ahead of their teachers, especially the senior ones. This entails the expanding responsibility that the teacher must have in encouraging students to think about what they are learning and why they are learning it. Also, students need to develop critical skills in order to use information fully and significantly, and teachers must be able to train them in these skills. Pennycook (2001) used the term *critical literacy*, proposing a new English curriculum in which students must develop not only knowledge of text content but also knowledge about texts and text genre.

Finally, the counselling role of the teacher is expanding as learners confront the need to make decisions about their learning. With the new role of language counselling, teachers must now develop the traditional guidance to incorporate a far greater number of tasks and a sequence in which they can be completed which best suit a student's needs, both cognitive and affective. In this view, "the teacher participates as a learner among learners" (Crookes & Lehner, 1998, p. 321). In other words, language counselling involves teacher and student negotiating learning goals and paths.

In general, the Internet means very much to learner-centred model because they are both a learning and a teaching tool. By transferring to students much of the responsibilities for accessing, sequencing and deriving from information, the Internet provides an ideal learner-centred environment in which "students possess the right and power to make decisions" (Crookes & Lehner, 1998, p. 321). The teacher becomes something like more an older, more experienced partner in collaboration than an authenticated leader (Landow, 2006). In this pedagogical environment, teachers are encouraged to portray themselves in polylogic rather than monologic roles.

However, Laurillard (2008, p. 144) argued that

Technology is certainly part of the problem here, as it impacts increasingly on the conduct of education. It is new, ever-changing, expensive, difficult to master, complex to manage, wide-ranging in its potential, disruptive of existing systems. And although there is usually funding for the hardware and infrastructure, there has never been, ....., commensurate funding for staff development, training, content development and research.

Admittedly, there are some drawbacks and problems to consider when using the Internet in designing a syllabus. Anyway, it is clear if we are in favour of the argument that that education must aim at teaching people to gather information from an extensive variety of sources, and to integrate what they have gathered into a coherent whole so that it becomes knowledge, then the Internet is a useful medium to achieve this aim. Therefore, language teachers are ought to bear in mind the educational advantages and challenges of the Internet in order to regulate the teaching programmes to meet the learners' needs.

#### **4. How does the Internet affect the materials development?**

Many Vietnamese EFL teachers and learners as well as other non-English native countries often comment on feelings of the lack of and difficulties in finding authentic resources and materials (Kilickaya, 2004) for their teaching and learning. It is, therefore, necessary to explore some possibilities and opportunities provided by the Internet with the focus on the WWW as reliable ways to access authentic and up-to-date language resources and materials for EFL teachers and learners.

Since the Web provides an unlimited panorama of engaging in authentic and multimedia English materials and there are tremendous search capabilities of the Web, which allow instant access to up-to-date information on just about any topic imaginable, EFL teachers can explore and select relevant materials to fuel their class discussions by exposing their students to real tasks of future professions. These kinds of authentic tasks not only develop the learners' language skills, but also contribute to cultural understandings of various polities where English is used as an ENL, ESL or EFL. There are always many quick, easily accessed language-learning materials that provide latest information on different topics and themes for those teachers who do spend time and effort on browsing them on the WWW. [Http://www.ilovelanguages.com/](http://www.ilovelanguages.com/) is an example that offers a wealth of opportunities for language teachers to open up a wide range of lesson activities not only for practical skills like reading, writing and speaking, but for many culturally based activities for training interpreters and translators as well. Teachers of English at the College of Foreign Languages (CFL) of the University of Danang - Vietnam have started the routine of exploiting all possible opportunities using the WWW like <http://www.eslcafe.com/> to access the latest and authentic resources and materials in their teaching programmes. Actually, teachers may obtain ideas and resources from Websites to use more or less directly in their teaching at different levels, ranging from designing a programme, developing a curriculum, or planning lessons. A recent English teaching material, "Internet English" by Gitsaki and Taylor (2000) is a good example of the combination of learning English and learning how to use the Internet in a single lesson plan.

The challenge for language teachers is to integrate knowledge of teaching and learning strategies with an understanding of the features of the WWW, and to design appropriate lesson activities that meet the learners' needs. There are a number of features of the WWW which might be used for teaching and learning. Perhaps, hypertext and hypermedia are major ones as they have the potential for developers to create links between text and other media not only within an individual document but also between documents residing on any computers in the world which have access to the Internet. Alexander (1995) proposed four approaches to using these Web features for teaching and learning: first, to create documents which contain hypertext/hypermedia links; second, to use hypertext programming in order to take advantage of the interactivity - a capability which it is claimed provides useful strategy for active learning; a third approach is to use the hypertext/hypermedia links on the Web to encourage learners to become collaborative authors. Finally, the fourth approach is to make use of a range of Internet services so that an integrated learning experience is realised.

## 5. Possible Problems and Suggested Solutions

Firstly, when it comes to curriculum problems, a lot of class time may have to be spent teaching students, especially those from the disadvantaged background, how to use the computer and software which will take time away from the focus of the class. If it is a writing class, for example, the more time spent on teaching computer skills means less time teaching composition. Harrison (1998) recommended that establishing a required course for incoming freshmen be a good sample way to solve this problem. Furthermore, looking at larger curricular issues, there are many interesting things teachers can do on the Internet, but do they fit with their curriculum? If a curriculum is an academic one, which focuses on accuracy, then perhaps using blogs or wikis, with its informal use of language and punctuation and its relaxed attitude toward typos may not be the best use of the Internet for the class, for instance. Instead, teachers may want to use the Internet for more formal help, such as the Purdue On-line Writing Lab <<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>>.

Secondly, as far as student problems are concerned, not all the information available on the Internet is desirable, appropriate or even relevant (Trotman, 2000) to students' studies. Much media attention has been focused on the availability of pornography on the Net, but there are also other problematic areas, such as texts containing racist propaganda. There is software on the market such as Surf Watch or Sex Reminder that to an extent assists parents and educators in protecting students against undesirable or less tasteful material, but it is not foolproof. Other software can trace an individual's 'footprints', so that the pages having been visited can be monitored. However, it is just a fact of life that censorship on the Internet is unenforceable. When the Internet is used in the classroom, there should be careful supervision.

Student attitudes and aptitudes should also be considered. Some students either do not like working with technology or do not have a "knack" for it (Nguyen, 2008). This problem needs special sensitivity on the part of the teacher or administrator. Perhaps circulating a computer attitude questionnaire at the beginning of the course to see if there are such students in the class would be a good way to address the problem. Any student indicating some apprehension could be given extra attention. In addition, providing an adequate computer orientation would help these students.

Another major problem related to students is that of copyright and plagiarism (Warschauer, 2004b). The Internet offers an excellent alternative to the library with its perhaps limited collection. However, the downside is that it is easy with the Internet, as with all electronic reference sources, to cut and paste with minimum effort, making it much easier to plagiarize. Extra care should be made to give students a clear explanation of what constitutes plagiarism, and how to avoid it. There is also a programme called Plagiarist Finder that helps teachers find out if this crime should be committed.

As with all technology-based pedagogy, there is bound to be technical problems. The problem with slow access to the Web because of physical limitations on the institution's connection to the Net is an example. The information highway may in no time be congested and the Internet will become a *paradise* for World Wide Wait. This means that the entire class may either not be able to access the Internet at the same time or that downloading may be exasperatingly slow. Teachers need to understand that technical problems are a fact of life in the CALL classroom, so they must have alternate lesson plans, as plan B, available when these problems occur. It is suggested, in the case of not-so-fact Internet connection like in Vietnam, that materials collected by the teacher could be provided on a designated *Internet computer*. Most Web browsers accompanied by HTML 5 with its new feature (Godwin-Jones, 2008) provide a basic way to either copy Websites from the WWW or support local database to be saved locally in the Internet computer. Furthermore, a free program like WebReaper <[www.webreaper.net](http://www.webreaper.net)> or WebWhacker <<http://www.bluesquirrel.com/products/webwhacker/>> can be used to reap or whack entire sites or as much of them as desired. These downloaded sites can then be copied to the designated Internet computer. WebReaper especially resets the links on the downloaded pages so that interaction on the Internet computer works exactly as it would be live on the Net. In fact, the interaction is even faster since the pages are stored on the computer's hard disk.

In addition to the plusses and minuses listed above, the biggest problem faced by many developing countries like Vietnam in integrating the Internet into the EFL classroom is the financial barrier. On the theory, the Internet solves the barrier of time and space (Kirkpatrick, 2002). However, it is important to keep in mind that though universal access is possible from the technical point of view, social, economic and geopolitical reality proves that the Internet can never be available to everyone in the world (Thorne, 2008a; Warschauer, 2003). The digital divide is still one of the most prevalent barriers. A recent annual study <<http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#vn>> by the Internet world statistics (2008) shows that in spite of being ranked among the top 10 Internet countries in Asia (Figure 2), only around 23% of the Vietnamese population of nearly 85 million have access to the Internet (at home, but mainly at offices or Internet cafes in big cities), and 80% of these Internet-assessable people are city dwellers while Vietnam is still considered an agricultural nation where approximately 70% of the population live on the farm.

The cost for technological equipment is probably the greatest obstacle to the acceptance of technology (Warschauer & Meskill, 2000) in most Vietnamese educational institutions. The number of college students who are not able to access the computer or the Internet is still large. Although each high school in cities has a computer room with the Internet

facilities, it can only accommodate 50 out of several hundreds of students at a time. This problem still remains, but with the increasing budget from the central government and the local educational boards, and the price of the computer coming down significantly, it is possibly expected that in the near future the financial problem of hardware cost in Vietnam can be solved. Moreover, the investment can be justified by the students' higher level of achievements attained with the support of technology.

Regarding educational software, one of the greatest facilitators of Internet use has been the growing application of course management software (CMS) such as Blackboard <[www.blackboard.com](http://www.blackboard.com)>, Prometheus <[www.prometheus.com](http://www.prometheus.com)> and WebCT <[www.webct.com](http://www.webct.com)>. These products allow automated or semi-automated creation of course web pages, allowing faculty to easily post syllabi, class announcements, resources and reading materials, and to communicate with enrolled students in the class.

In Vietnam, the availability of high quality EFL software is a very pressing challenge in applying the new technologies because of their high costs. The local software development is also high-priced and time-consuming, and most importantly these programmers are often not pedagogically professional. However, this problem can be partly solved by using freeware which is designed for language education and can be obtained via the Internet. For the time being, it is highly recommended the free software entitled Moodle as quoted by the producers, "Moodle is open source and completely free to use" <<http://moodle.com/>>. Moodle has been used widely by teachers from many countries the world over. It is a valuable tool not only for English, but also for the other foreign language departments, e.g. French, Russian, Chinese, and Japanese, because it can handle up to 35 languages.

## 6. Conclusion

I would argue that the Internet technology facilitates the ten principles on critical pedagogy introduced by Crookes and Lehner (1998) in terms of syllabus design and materials development. An important use of computers for language teaching and learning is resource retrieval. The Internet includes the broadest array and the largest amount of information ever assembled on earth. So far information provided via the Internet could be seen as authentic and up-to-date teaching and learning materials. However, due to the nature of the subject matter, these resources and materials need expert help if they are to realise their potential. As language teachers we should bear in mind the fact that, like any other resources or teaching aids, the Internet in general, multimedia texts or hypertext in particular, cannot organise or run a lesson, the teacher is clearly a crucial element in the success or failure of a lesson. It is the teacher who ensures the context for learning and who chooses the materials to suit the learners' needs. In other words, online teachers need to process a variety of novel strategies to incorporate in their lesson plans (Romiszowski & Mason, 2004). The WWW is useless without careful choice and preparation of materials; so careful lesson planning and classroom management, and training of both learners and teachers are surely needed in order to exploit the best educational opportunities of using the Internet in language teaching and learning.

The challenge for educational developers is to use this knowledge to design appropriate curricula which promote an active approach to learning so that what students learn is a deep understanding of the subject content, the ability to analyse and synthesise data and information, and the development of creative thinking and good communication skills (Alexander, 1995). Also, it is important not only for language teachers, but also syllabus designers to realise to what extent the use of the Internet technology influences TESOL syllabus design as well as integration issue of CALL into the curriculum as a whole. Technology is essentially powerless without creative and imaginative application.

Finally, it is obvious that new methods and curricula associated with the Internet technology have profound significance for social, economic, and cultural life in the present and the foreseeable future. Recent and ongoing global trends have brought EFL and technology into complex relationships. Being able to understand these relationships and to develop learning programs and methods from them is seen as crucial in order to meet the educational requirements for viable and expansive futures from the personal to the (inter)national level. Above all, what we really need is to expand the learning process "... from what the technology can do for the student to what the student can do with the technology" (Godwin-Jones, 1999, p. 49).

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**Appendices**

Table 1. Ten principles of critical pedagogy (Crookes & Lehner, 1998)

No.	Principles
	The purpose of education is to develop critical thinking by presenting students' situation to them as a problem so that they can perceive, reflect, and act on it.
	The content of curriculum derives from the life situation of the learners as expressed in the themes of their reality.
	Dialogue forms the content of the educational situation.
	The organization of curriculum recognizes the class as a social entity and resource.
	The learners produce their own learning materials.
	The task of planning is, first, to organize generative themes, and second, to organize subject matter as it relates to those themes.
	The teacher participates as a learner among learners.
	Teachers contribute their ideas, experiences, opinions, and perceptions to the dialogical process.
	The teacher's function is one of posing problems.
	The students possess the right and power to make decisions.

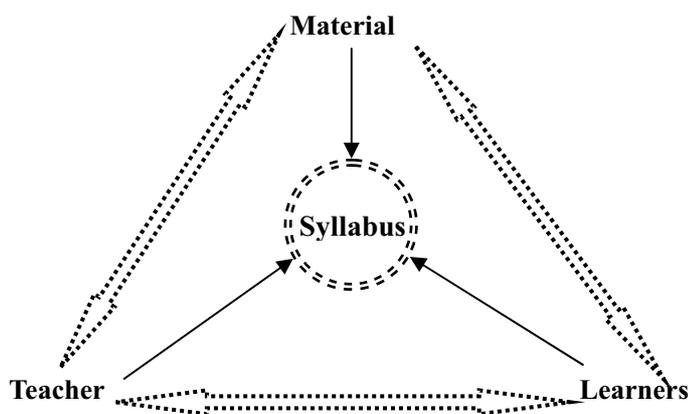
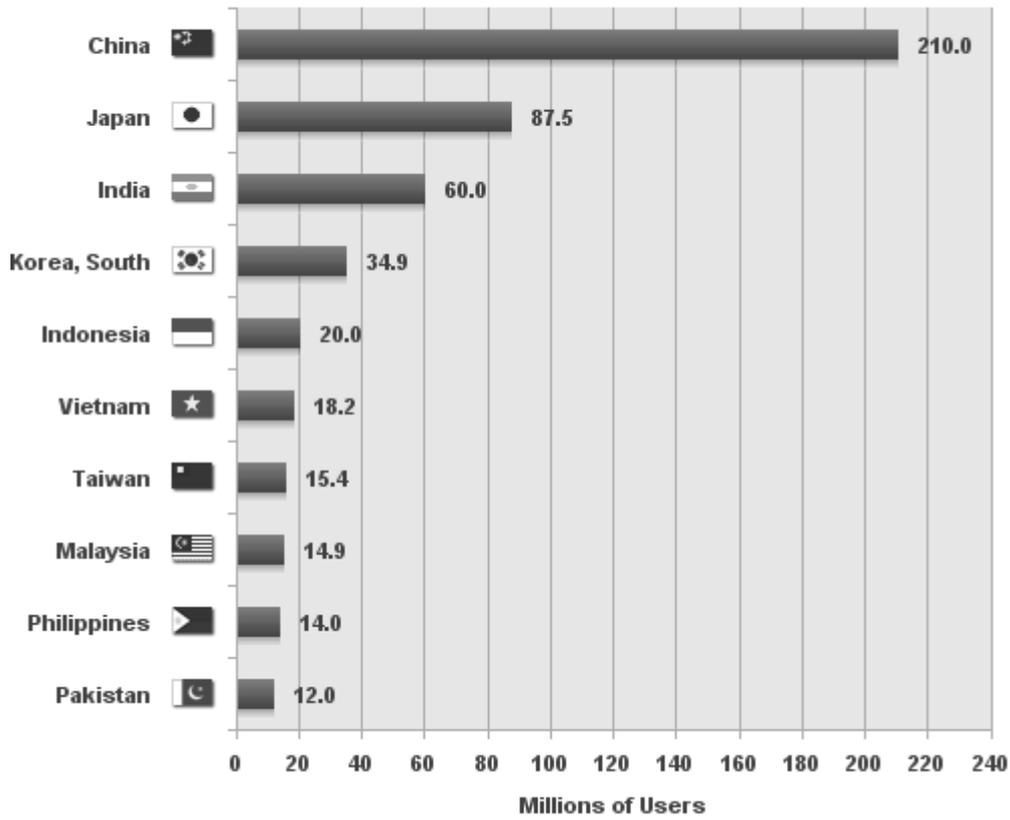


Figure 1. Critical factors affecting the syllabus design

### Asia Top 10 Internet Countries December 2007



Source: Internet World Stats - [www.internetworldstats.com](http://www.internetworldstats.com)  
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Figure 2. Asia top 10 Internet countries (Source: Internet World Statistics)



## China English and ELT for English Majors

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### Abstract

This paper is a general study of one of varieties of English—China English and its influence on English Language Teaching (ELT) for English majors. The status of English as an International language breaks the situation in which British English or American English is the sole standard. English becomes World Englishes, taking on a plural form, which include many varieties of English with nativized cultural, political and economical characteristics. Researchers in China believe that China English as a variety of English has been objectively in existence and become a lingua franca. It consolidates the cultural identity of the Chinese speakers of English, enriches the multiple identities of English and plays an important role in promoting Chinese culture internationally. For teachers of English majors, it presents challenges to their traditional view of language teaching.

**Keywords:** World Englishes, China English, Cultural identity, English language teaching

### 1. Introduction

The widespread of English and its importance in international communication has established its status as an international language or a global language (Crystal, 1997). The Indian linguist Braj Kachru (1985, 1992) views English today in terms of three concentric circles: the Inner Circle, the outer circle and the expanding circle. The inner circle refers to the places where English is a native language (ENL), including the US, UK, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The Outer Circle involves the earlier phases of the spread of English in non-native settings, where English is a second language, including Singapore, India, Malaysia and fifty other territories (ESL). The Expanding Circle involves those nations which recognize the English as a foreign language (EFL), including China, Japan, Greece, Poland, and an increasing number of other countries. A plural word Englishes came into use, which had been admitted by scholars such as Strang (1970), Strevens (1982), and Kachru (1997,1980). As language expresses, embodies and symbolizes cultural reality (Kramsch, 1998:3), the pluralistic English has taken upon itself double roles: one is manifestation of Westernness, the Judeo-Christian tradition, the other is the representation of the culture of its speaker. As Kachru states, "English has multiple identities...in the international contexts, English represents a repertoire of cultures, not a monolithic culture" (1989: 86). It is in this context that the issue of China English has been brought into discussion. What is the status of China English? How is it used? What is its influence on foreign language teaching, particularly on teaching English for English majors?

### 2. The status quo of China English study in China

In view of the multiplicity of English and the increasing attention on it, it's justified to regard the English spoken and used by Chinese people as one of its varieties. Here I would like to use the term China English. China English is different from Chinglish since the latter is a term the foreigners use to describe the substandard language phenomenon occurring in the English spoken by the Chinese, due to the influence of the Chinese language. The difference between these two concepts has for long time been the object of attention in the field of linguistics. So far as I am concerned, the major difference lies in their acceptability. China English can be accepted by other English speakers while Chinglish is despised as substandard.

China English means the English spoken or used by speakers with a Chinese linguistic and cultural background. The concept of China English and the discussion of it was brought about by Ge Chuangui (1982) when he talked about some issues of translation from Chinese into English. He said that in translating things typically Chinese it was inevitable to use some Chinese expressions for English, such as Four Books (*si shu*), Five Classics (*wu jing*), *ju ren*, *xiu cai*, etc., of which the equivalent couldn't be found in English. Many scholars joined the discussion in the wake including Sun Li (1989), Wang Rongpei (1991), Li Wenzhong (1993), Xie Zhijun (1995), Du Ruiqing & Jiang Yajun (2001) and Pan Zhangxian (2002,2005). *World Englishes* published a special issue on English in China from interdisciplinary perspectives, providing ideas and thought in the issue "how cultural, linguistic and literary contact between China and

the West has been mediated by the English language and what the current status, functions and features of English are in China” (Pan, 2005). These studies of China English point to a fact that China English has become an objective existence.

### 3. China English in use

China English is now used in many fields such as in intercultural communication, in contact literature, and in international community of English.

#### 3.1 China English in China's Intercultural Communication

In expressing things typically Chinese things that have no counterparts in English, we resort to China English expressions, such as *Cultural Revolution*, *Red Guard*, *Mahjong*, *Fengshui*, etc. Even in cases that an English semantic equivalent convey with different expression, China English may be purposefully adopted by the user so as to enhance his or her Chinese identity apart from showing the Chineseness of the English expression. In journals of external publicity, there is an increasing tendency to use China English wording. For instance,

(1) There is an old Chinese saying, *How can you catch tiger cubs without entering the tiger's lair?* The saying holds true for man's practice and it also holds true for the theory of knowledge.

This is a translation of a quotation from Mao Zedong's *On Practice*, published by Foreign Language Press in 1964. In English there is one equivalent: Noting ventured, nothing gained. However, it fails to communicate to the readers the cultural implications of that the tiger carries in Chinese culture.

(2) *Three cobblers with their wits combined equal Zhuge Liang the master mind.* In other words, the masses have great creative power. (published by Being Foreign Language Press in 1965).

In Chinese culture, the historical figure Zhuge Liang represents one of the greatest minds, so familiar to the Chinese people that he became a symbol of wisdom. In English, similar meaning is conveyed by “two heads are better than one”, which is used less vividly. In English, “Solomon” is a biblical figure used as a metaphor for a wise person, however “three cobblers make one Solomon” would lose the original Chinese color in the works by Mao Zedong.

(3) *Good wine is not afraid of being located at the end of a long lane.* (*China Today*, Vol.49, No.7, 2000)

In English we find its equivalent: Good wine needs no bush. Both idioms are intended for things that are of true value and that don't need advertisements. However, they carry different cultural features, though similar in meaning. The Chinese idiom reflects a culture of agricultural production typical of traditional Chinese society, in which manual production was an additional mode of economy apart from farming. There is also another Chinese element, *lane*, emphasizing the folk way of living. Still, the translation of the Chinese idiom allows for improvement in the rendering of *jiu* into wine, as wine is not more Chinese than liquor. In contrast, the English idiom emphasizes the more highly developed commercial civilization.

#### 3.2 China English in Contact Literature

According to Kachru (1992), English has four functions in the expanding circles of it: instrumental (as a medium in education, regulative (as a regulative instrument in the legal system and administration), interpersonal (as a lingua franca in interpersonal communication), creative (as a language in creative and imaginative writings). Contact literature refers to the non-native writing or non-native English literature, or English-language literature by non-native writers. As an extension of contact language which has both a face of its own and a face of the language with which it has contact, contact literature is a blend of two or more linguistic textures and literary traditions. Contact literature writers such as Lin Yutang, Amy Tan, and Jung Chang, etc. consciously or not, are using China English in writing. They write for westerners or the native speakers of English rather than the Chinese readers while drawing on Chinese stories as their fictional resources, which cater to the needs of the western readers to understand China and the life of Chinese people. Lin Yutang is known for his achievements in introducing Chinese culture to the West. In his works, we find a distinct Chinese cultural identity in his purposeful use of China English.

(1) The *Dog-Meat General* was called a man of *three-don't-knows*. He didn't know how many soldiers he had, how much money he had, and how many wives, Chinese and Russian. (Lin Yutang, *Moment in Peking*, 709)

Lin is referring to Zhang Zongchang. He was derogatorily nicknamed as “dog-meat general” because he was gambler and lover of dog meat. Chinese people eat almost everything including dogs. Yet to foreigners, dog-meat is unthinkable because they regard them as Man's Best Friend and keep them as pets. Lin interwove the Chinese image into English, and the meaning is self-evident in the context although the expression is exotic to the English readers.

(2) Heaven has no eyes! (Lin Yutang, *The Importance of Living*, 23)

Westerners believe that it's God that controls the world, while the Chinese believe it is the Heaven that cares everything for them. When Westerners cry out “Oh, my God!” “God Bless you!”, the Chinese exclaim “Oh, my Heaven!” The exclamation as an example here is typically Chinese, showing the dominating role of Heaven in the life of Chinese.

(3) Killing the landscape appears in *Moment in Peking*, and is literally translated by Lin from *sha feng jing*, although an English idiom “a wet blanket” denotes the same meaning. This purposeful choice of words shows Lin’s effort to communicate Chinese culture to the West, and his effort to maintain his Chinese identity.

(4) Does he mean to throw the city editor and break his *rice-bowl*, starving all the people dependent on him? (*My Country and My People*, 170)

*Rice-bowl* is a literal translation of *fan wan*, the meaning of which is expressed figuratively in English is “bread and butter”. Both are used metaphorically to mean “the means of livelihood” yet manifest different cultures.

From what’s stated above, we can see that the speakers with Chinese linguistic and cultural identities are consciously or unconsciously transferring Chinese cultural identities into English, thus endowing China English with distinctive cultural identities. Meanwhile, China English functions as a cohesive device in consolidating its speakers’ cultural identity in intercultural communication. As Claire Kramersch declares that “there is a natural connection between the language spoken by members of a social group and that group’s identity. By the accent, their vocabulary, their discourse patterns, speakers identify themselves and are identified as members of this or that speech and discourse community. From this membership, they draw personal strength and pride, as well as a sense of importance and historical continuity from using the same language as the group they belong to”. (Kramersch, 1998: 65-66)

### 3.3 China English in International Community of English

China English is gaining increasing recognition in international community of English and frequently find their way in the circle of English as a Native Language (ENL). Examples are as follows:

(1) These colonies are constant and even increasing drain on France. They are for her *the tiger which she has mounted* (to use the Chinese phrase) *and she can neither manage nor get rid of*. (*Time*, November 10, 1989)

The Chinese phrase is used metaphorically for a dilemma situation, the equivalent of which in English is “to be on the horns of a dilemma” or “to have a wolf by the ear”. However, the use of the Chinese idiom would produce exotic color to English, which would arouse the interest of the readers and would help them gain a kind of strange, but rewarding reading experience, and learn something about Chinese culture.

(2) So allow me to begin by using a Chinese expression—and you will have to forgive my pronunciation—*pao zhuan yin yu—to throw a brick to retrieve a jade*—and try to explain American perceptions about our hopes and dreams for the future. (Speech by US Vice President Gore at Tsinghua University, March 26, 1997)

The purpose of having the Chinese borrowings in the speeches of political leaders is to shorten the distance between the speakers and the audience by showing their respect to the Chinese language and culture. Of course, this is a diplomatic strategy or tactic to appeal to the audience, nevertheless it suggests the transfer of Chinese culture into English. In the repertoire of loan words in English, we find Chinese loan words showing that China English enriches the language of English. They include food, medicine, plant, traditional arts and sports, political expressions and terms etc. A recent report says that there are altogether 1488 Chinese loan words in English (Wang, 2002:391). As language changes with society, such number is bound to mount. As language is the embodiment of culture, China English words also makes a great contribution in promoting Chinese culture. A convincing example is seen from former US President Ronald Reagan who quoted from *Daodejing* in his State of the Union Address: “To govern a great nation requires the same care as to fry a small fish.” With the more frequent cultural exchanges in the globalization era, we’re justified in predicting that China English will be playing an increasingly important role in cross-cultural communication and gain an increasingly recognition in the international community of English.

## 4. China English in ELT for English majors

The idea that English has become Englishes and China English is an objective existence has been recognized by most scholars in the field of foreign language teaching and research as stated above. Meanwhile, questions are likely to occur and are thought-provoking to teachers of English majors. For example, how should we view cultural teaching while teaching language? Should we teach one culture at the sacrifice of another? What influences will it bring to language planning and curriculum design? How should they, as non-native speakers of English, treat different varieties of English in their teaching? Which variety is considered as the “standard English” for students, British or American, or something else?

The answer to the first question has already been unanimously agreed. Language is part of culture and provides a key to unlocking the heart of a culture. Therefore, learning another language is inseparable from learning another culture. As a matter of fact, China English is the very product of the nativization of English in the globalization era, and a product of the communication and integration between Chinese and Western cultures. English should not only be used for learning British or American cultural patterns, but also for promoting Chinese traditions, customs and values internationally. As to students, they are expected to be both bilingual and bicultural (although the latter seems more difficult). English should be an instrument for expressing Chinese culture as well as cultures of English-speaking countries. Therefore, in

curriculum design, an appropriate portion should be given to Chinese culture teaching in English. Currently, however, few universities have incorporated that into their course design. My survey on courses taught for English majors at the three universities in Yantai including Yantai University, Ludong University, and Shandong Institute of Business and Technology indicates that cultural teaching is generally Western culture -oriented and courses taught include British Culture and Society , American Culture and Society, A General Survey of Britain and USA.

Another question that teachers should consider is: What is standard English? What kind of English should we teach to students? Nowadays, the monolithic situation in which British English or American English is the sole standard has been broken and what follows is the varieties of English or the pluralistic Englishes such as British English, American English, Australian English, Canadian English, etc, and more should be added to the list including China English in view of Kachru's theory of concentric circle. Their cultural and linguistic characteristics should be part of teaching objectives. Students should be exposed to various varieties of English through diverse channels and teaching activities.

The Globalization and nativization of English will inevitably influence English teaching and call for reform of it. Teachers have to adapt themselves to the changing situations, accept new ideas and adopt new methods.

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## A Study of Autonomy English Learning on the Internet

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### Abstract

With the variety of environment and method of English learning, Autonomy English learning on the Internet is playing a more and more important role in modern English learning. It challenges the traditional learning approach, and also is forwardness. This paper points out that autonomy English learning on the Internet facilitates the improvement of the English level even more on the basis of the author's acquisition and experience, as well as explains the favorable factors and unfavorable factors of autonomy English learning on the Internet, suggesting the effective strategies of autonomy English learning on the Internet.

**Keywords:** Autonomy English learning, Internet, Virtual English environment

### 1. Introduction

Nowadays, quality-oriented education has become the ultimate goal of our education. The core of English learning has shifted to how to develop the ability of autonomy learning anytime and anywhere. The application of internet technology has developed a new field for autonomy English learning which is becoming more and more popular at home and abroad. Learning English on the Internet can create efficient and high-quality achievement in personal or mass English learning. More and more people start to pay attention to it and study how to make a full use of it.

English learning needs an English environment, but we cannot always communicate with the native speakers of English face to face. What teaching of traditional English adopted is one-way teaching mode from teacher to student, which violates the essence of language teaching that is cultivating students' language communication competence. Now, we could say that the Internet shrinks and bridges the distance between the people of the world in space, and makes a globalized communicational stage. The way using the Internet to learn English can compensate for the lack of general approach with no real English environment, which will greatly enhance English autonomy learning.

However, in China, it's not universal that English learners use the Internet to autonomy English learning. The efficiency of learning is low, the result is not satisfactory. What are the reasons and how to deal well with the permanent approach for the ideal goal of autonomy English learning is a must to seek for the resolution.

### 2. Favorable factors of autonomy English learning on the Internet

Autonomy English learning on the Internet is one of the most important learning approaches which mostly reflects the main part and individual-orientation of students' study. According to one's conditions, a person can choose the learning materials, methods and the depth of study; arrange study on one's own schedule. As we all know, different people have different background knowledge, study ability and cognitive ability on study. In class, teachers always have no time to focus on the different acceptance specially. So, there is not efficient. While it is extremely different in the approach of autonomy English learning on the Internet, which always offers the great initiative on study, rich variety of choices, typical individual character of study, notional flexibility for arrangement and pleased dynamic interaction. Of course, there are some relatively unfavorable factors of autonomy English learning on the Internet, for example, appearing poor ability of learner's autonomy English learning, negative impact of English learning motivation and other external environmental impact. It is a considerable issue to find the resolution to overcoming how to approach the former and avoid the latter. All in all, autonomy English learning on the Internet depends on the learners' internal factors. Adding to teachers' supervision, assistance and guidance, the subjective willing of the learners is the key to the goal of learning English on the Internet well.

### 3. Requirements for efficiency of autonomy English learning on the Internet

#### 3.1 Promoting self-monitoring ability

Self-monitoring ability is to play full the enthusiasm of learners and the initiative of learning, and gives the main body of individual the fundamental recognition. The self-monitoring level of students is the key factor to success in autonomy English learning in the relatively free-loose Internet environment. The Cognitive Constructivism School believed that autonomy learning was actually the learning of cognitive monitoring, and the process that students

actively adjust learning strategies and effort based on their learning abilities and learning tasks. Learning strategies mean the various actions and steps students take in order to effectively study and develop themselves.

In order to really realize promoting self-monitoring ability, the followings are additional. First, learners should establish a good learning goal. Second, learners should formulate feasible study plan. Third, learners should optimize the self-evaluation for his learning process, confidence and effects.

### *3.2 Strengthening cooperation*

In the situation of all mass organizations, random and disorder, which easily lead to "information Trek" and "information overload", and at the isolation between students and teachers, which always leads the role of teacher and teaching management weakening at learning on the Internet, it is very practical for the present learners to strengthen and develop the strong awareness of cooperation among the mass of autonomy English learners on the Internet. Most students in the personal autonomy English learning on the Internet are generally lack of stamina. The development of autonomy English learning ability on the Internet should not be blindly optimistic. First all, they need realize that fact that teachers are the most direct and important guide, partners and supervisors for providing a good environment, helping students strengthen their autonomy consciousness and develop independent learning behaviors, so as to enhance the capacity of autonomy learning, specifically to manifest in learning strategies, to ensure the implementation of the plan, to build a learning platform for students and timely to provide students with the necessary knowledge, skills and many other help; to direct students formulate learning goals, to encourage more cooperation between the learner groups and supervise the realization of self-evaluation

### *3.3 Optimizing of network configuration*

There are many elements to influence the quality of English learning network, such as, the restriction of builders' purpose, foreign languages level, technology. As well as, the laws and regulations to protect the copyright of network is imperfect at present. The contents of the website are seriously challenged. We should establish a sense of innovation and appeal to professionals joining in the building of websites for the stabile team of building sites. Sites builders' occupation, education philosophy, English degree, the level of modern educational technology, and interest can influence the quality of websites. Voices of English as an example: because site builders are experts of foreign language teaching and network education, its website has these advantages: positioning clear, distinctive features, abundant resources, rational design and high interactive. Excellent English language learning websites should reflect the advanced teaching philosophy. The development of English-language websites ultimately depends on English educators of their own efforts.

English teachers are familiar with the teaching and learning process and education regulation that should become the major force of the construction of sites. Measures should be taken to guide and encourage English teachers learning multimedia and network technology, and actively participate in the construction of English learning websites, so that they can establish a number of high-quality sites to meet the growing demands of English learners and promote network process of China's English Learning. At the same time, we should encourage dialogues between English teachers and computer or network professional and technical personnel to cooperate in the development of sites, in order to form a specialized and diversified construction site team for the whole soul and heart to serve the learner on Internet.

## **4. Approaches of autonomy English learning on Internet**

### *4.1 English learning website*

As we all know, the content and knowledge in class are limited, and are impractical. The application of Internet technology has greatly broken the limitations of space and time in class. Autonomy English learning on the Internet can spread the knowledge from in class to out of class. Of course, websites cannot take the place of library, but it has its own special functions while the library has not, such as, speed of search, immediate information, etc. Some sites provide large amount of English language learning and information, such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, testing, and background knowledge. That information, including some audio and visual information can be downloaded. It has been recommended two foreign English language learning websites as following:

1) <http://eleaston.com/english.html>

2) <http://www.eslcafe.com/>

If you want to visit more pages, you can use the search engine, such as: Yahoo. You can type: "TESL", "ESL", "TEFL", "EFL", "English learning", "English Study", or "Distance learning", you will get what you want.

### *4.2 English learning magazine*

There are many free English learning magazines and regular e-mail about English learning for you on the Internet. Now here are several free e-mail magazines. Firstly, you can send an email to this address: [vu47-request@burger.forfree.com](mailto:vu47-request@burger.forfree.com). On the body of letter, you only need write: subscribe vu47 and your e-mail address. You will receive an email on

English vocabulary, phrases and syntax every week. Secondly, you can send an email to this address: [trivia@mailbits.com](mailto:trivia@mailbits.com). You will receive a daily e-mail to give an explanation or tell stories and dubious origin for a word of English and a form of expression. Thirdly, you can send an email to this address: [up-to-date-idioms-subscribe@onelist.com](mailto:up-to-date-idioms-subscribe@onelist.com). You will receive an e-mail each working day. They teach you an American idiom each time, and give out an explanation and an example. Fourthly, domestic free e-mail magazine, "English Zone". Please send e-mail to the address: [list@soim.com](mailto:list@soim.com). Theme written: subscribe English. You will receive three English learning e-mails every week.

#### *4.3 English Learning Discussion Group by E-mail*

It's a more economic way to subscribe by e-mail. There are many English learning discussion groups on the Internet, such as, the intensive English forum, science and technology English forum, the English Writing forum and teaching discussion forum. I recommend three abroad discussion groups. 1) "English writing forum": you should send an email to the address: [listserv@listserv.net](mailto:listserv@listserv.net). You should write "SUBSCRIBE ECOMP-L" on letter body. 2) "English learning lover": you should send an email to the address: [Majordomo@coe.Missouri.edu](mailto:Majordomo@coe.Missouri.edu). Besides, you should write "subscribe English-L" on letter body. 3) "BBC": you should send an email to the address: [Majordomo@listserv.bbc.uk](mailto:Majordomo@listserv.bbc.uk) and you should write "subscribe BBC-ELT" on letter body.

There are different methods to subscribe to the different thematic discussion groups. Generally speaking, when one sends these e-mails to reserve some topics of discussion groups, will receive two letters. One is that you have been notified to accede to the forum; the other is to introduce something about it, such as the aims, using method, managers and competent units of the name and address. Some enable you to reply upon its requirements, and some let you read the group's charter and regulations. After agreement, you have to reply a signed e-mail to two important addresses. One is sent to all members of topics discussion group, where you can ask questions or raise your points of view on the issues of others. If the group includes 1,000 people, all of them can see your issues and perspectives. The other is sent to the person in charge of the group. If you have any technical problems or you want to withdraw from this group, you can send an e-mail to this address with much care.

#### *4.4 English chat room*

In order to develop oral English, many people take oral class, chat with foreign teachers, or participate in English corners on campus. However, they still find it little effective. The key reason is that their confidence is not enough. And the next is their package of abundant practice.

Now, you can invite foreign teachers to your home and talk with native speakers anywhere and anytime. That makes the best use of the communication function of the Internet and brakes limitation of time and space. English chatting needs quick reflection. So, it's a very good promotion to virtual communication. Chatting on the Internet, you can understand different country's cultural connotation and background. Meanwhile, it can stimulate the interest in oral or write, and improve the level step by step. Now I recommend Yahoo chat rooms. When you enter into Yahoo website: [http://events.yahoo.com/netevent/Chat\\_Rooms/](http://events.yahoo.com/netevent/Chat_Rooms/), firstly you must conduct chat room registration, and then you will be requested to have a name and a password. Then, you must fill a number of other elements, such as: Address and e-mail address, etc. Finally, you can enter the chat room.

#### *4.5 Foreign pen pals on Internet*

We can communicate with foreign pen pals via e-mail on the Internet. There are several websites to making pen pals. In these pages, you can see the dating ads by people from various countries to make friends. you can choose to make your friends, or you could play your own Personal ads, soon you will receive the e-mail from your friends. I recommend three pen pal web sites:

- 1). <http://www.wfi.fr/volterre/keypals.html>
- 2). <http://deil2.lang.uiuc.edu/penpals/>
- 3) <http://www.linguistic-funland.com/addapal.html>

If you want to visit more friends' websites, you can search them through engines. You can type "pen pal" and "key pal", you will find more websites.

#### *4.6 Online electronic bulletin board system*

Electronic bulletin boards system (BBS) also is called 'forum'. We can participate in online electronic bulletin board system to English study and discussion. Electronic bulletin boards system like a big bulletin board, you can paste the issue of English learning to the above, and advocate the problems in the process of learning English. You can exchange of experience and discuss with your friends to find the best answer on it. Firstly, you have to conduct user registration in the relevant forums, such as the English forums of Sohu educational channel (<http://learning.sohu.com/>), and then enter into the bulletin board. If you want to visit more electronic bulletin board system, you can type "BBS" to conduct searches.

## 5. Conclusion

We find the approach of autonomy English learning on the Internet is completely different from the traditional one. Learners obtain knowledge on the Internet instead of lonely dependence on teachers and books. Learning resources from the Internet not only are very colorful, but also multi-channeled, multi-perspective, multi-leveled and multi-formed. Moreover, it is very quick and timely. We can choose learning materials from the extensive resources we need on the Internet, thus which easily aroused keen interest in learning initiative.

It can fully move the initiative and enthusiasm and improve the learning efficiency. Although autonomy learning on the Internet can bring so much benefit and convenience to us, it's no enough to be used. If we really make the best use of it, our English learning will be expected and successful. Autonomy English learning on the Internet will be popular with everybody fully in the future. Everyone will develop and strengthen the ability of autonomy English learning on the Internet, so that we can acquire the skill of life-long learning to serve ourselves and the whole society better.

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## Radical Changes and Shifting Paradigms in Intercultural Communication: With Special Reference to Gender

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### Abstract

Today most of the organizations are operated at global level. Thus undeniably there is an overwhelming influence of culture on business. To promote healthy business, study of culture and its relation with language is inevitable. A thorough understanding of cultural differences will pave way for effective transaction at work places and this in turn would lead to organizational effectiveness and subsequent growth. With this main objective, the paper elaborates the cross-cultural study with special reference to gender. The paper extends valuable suggestions to overcome the barriers arising out of ethnocentrism so that communication at workplace could be improved, involving people from culturally diverse backgrounds. Non-verbal communication and gestures that contribute to lack of understanding of the speaker's intent is also critically examined.

As compared to yester years, the world is changing with tremendous pace and radical changes are observed in every walk of life and language development and its contribution to these changes is no exception.

**Keywords:** Intercultural communication, Globalization, Barriers due to ethnocentrism, Gender based problems

### 1. Doctrines of dynamism in intercultural communication

In today's volatile business world and in the fast changing socio-economic milieu, corporate communication and social interaction, when viewed from a strategic perspective, are undergoing radical changes in external and internal environment, compelling the executives and linguists to think strategically about an organization's identity and how it is being communicated to the receiving end. Over the past few decades there has been a renewed interest among the academicians, linguists, grammarians, managers, and practitioners about the role of culture in diverse disciplines like organizational network, corporate communication, foreign trade and psychology. The organizations that discovered these truths and doctrines of dynamism in intercultural communication had modified and blurred the image of many organizations across the globe.

#### 1.1 Success rate of Communication

More than 75% of the business communication is preferred through the medium of oral communication. It is simply not sufficient to have the through knowledge of structural items of language for better and effective communication. In true sense nuances of communication decide the success rate of communication in any field. During the process of

communication apart from the structural knowledge cultural backgrounds of the communicator and the commune also influence their verbal and non-verbal signals. However it is broadly viewed and accepted by many that people belonging to similar backgrounds are more likely to interpret each other's usage accurately. Despite this strong belief people under identical conditions are bound to commit errors and may not decode the meaning as conveyed or transmitted by the sender. All this leads to chaos and confusion in business and life. Communication varying across cultures further distorts this problem and increase the chances of truncated message i.e. message received differ from message sent.

### 1.1.1 Frustration in young graduates

It is very unfortunate in many countries that language teaching is solely restricted to structural items or the content. All this is leading to greater degree of frustration in the young graduates who find themselves mismatched with their competitors at global level. Undeniably language usage is demanded in its highest degree of performance due to the coming up of multinational companies and international market. Our language classrooms very often neglect the cultural aspect and in some states it is totally absent. Hence there is an urgent need to explore the intervening cultural bias in order to draw the essence of content.

## 2. Role of Culture in Oral Communication

### 2.1 Exchange of complex information

Surveys in the areas of communication reveal that oral communication has remarkable impact on the career advancement of any person whether business, politics, corporate sectors, athletes or social reformers. The line of action of these professionals demands heavy exchange of complex information in variety of forms. This flow of information may be disrupted due to large number of factors and cultural bias is no exception. Culture in broader sense refers to the behavioral characteristics typical to an individual or a group. These cultural traits are unique and are reflected through both verbal and non-verbal communication. People belonging to different cultural backgrounds use different methods of communication. In an attempt to save the time Americans do not bother the use of slang whereas time is flexible for few countries, hence they avoid using slang. But this difference in ethnic diversity if not commonly shared and understood by both the ends creates a feeling of alienation. If both receiver and sender are on the similar or shared cultural platform they have less chances of misinterpretation than of those whose cultural backgrounds are wide apart. Culture seems to differ from person to person. Politeness, courtesy and consideration differ from one region to another affecting the output and final result. Attitudinal variation to much extent is due to cultural differences. Every man's mind is a unique filter and their communication filters when interacted with each other create frictions leading to communication barriers.

### 2.2 Problems due to closed society structures

Problems related to intercultural communication can be best understood by considering the case studies of certain areas. When we consider the under developed regions of some states in India, say, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan etc., we find astonishing truths which reveal the actual reasons of backwardness which unfortunately is not due to poor knowledge or inappropriate skills but due to excess of love towards the incorrect dialects and strict adherence to their culture and traditions. The best part of their belief is though they are below the level of poverty they are highly contended and this is perhaps due to their deeply religious thoughts. Thus throughout the history these places have remained culturally autonomous and have hardly any inclination towards intercultural thinking. Their language is different not only in phonetic configuration but also in semantic terms. Excessive love for their local languages and spiritual thinking had made them irresponsible and unconnected with the rest of the world. Some of the literates of these areas seem to possess the deep scholastic heritage and scholarly knowledge of their unique language and culture, but this only made them timid and unacceptable towards other cultures which are more advanced in many respects. Such examples of language varieties and closed society structures are common sights in India. Their socio cultural and educational seclusion can only take them to the stagnated society. The students nurtured in this social structure are very obedient and intelligent but due to deep-rooted alienation towards foreign culture and exposure they under perform in oral communication. Secondly their progress rate is comparatively low as they are not aggressive or determined to accept the social changes at global level. Hence they exhibit their helplessness, low motivation level and lowering self-respect. This hinders their inner growth. Secondly English language learning is confined to classrooms; hence they are not free from cultural clichés. Over use of connectors, that and which clauses, repetition of words, use of dull and hackneyed expressions, vagueness in expression etc. are their common problems. To overcome these problems teaching needs methodological changes. Wide cultural diversity and inadequate role models for proper communication creates barriers in communication. Following measures should be taken for enhancing the skills:

- Learner oriented programmes should be designed using audio visual aids.
- Role models should be provided or created.
- Oral communication should be chiseled.

- Cultural background of the target language should be well informed.
- Comparative study of languages is essential.
- Non-verbal communication like tone, pitch, pace, pauses, word-rate etc. needs improvement.

### 2.3 Transmission of culture

Most of the eastern countries face problems due to gender differences in communication behaviors. The habit of judging the people of opposite sex according to their own standards is as serious as across cultures. Hence it has become a matter of great concern to many researchers and linguists to identify the problem seriously and suggest measures to overcome these difficulties. New structures of competence should be designed to convey the intended meaning in a specific situation for a group of people brought up in the same culture and groups across cultures. The influence of culture on communication is so remarkable that anthropologist Edward Hall says, "Culture is communication and communication is culture". Our feelings, beliefs and behaviors in reference to gender influence not only the general communication within the same culture but also intercultural communication. Since times immemorial females are characterized as emotional, sensitive, delicate and highly expressive through gestures and expressions. Males on the other hand are characterized as practical, blunt, independent, aggressive and result-oriented. Hence the communication between these two ends especially in Asian countries is bound to create problems since these characteristics entirely change the mode and manner of communication. Unfortunately some societies in India train the males and females by laying emphasis on sex roles they are expected to follow in the society. With the variety in religion, caste, rituals, traditions and languages communication of a particular kind influences every individual's personality and behavior. Their family members and other members of the society transfer the hierarchical acquisition to the later generations, by imparting trainings, for justifying their roles in the society as per the traditions. On the contrary these created problems are not that acute in Western countries. Hence unlike Indian ways a separate code of conduct is not designed in developed countries to manage communication between opposite sex.

### 3. Gender based problems in Intercultural communication

After independence, modernization, industrialization and migration have brought in some distinguished changes in stereotyped concepts of masculinity and femininity affecting the intercultural communication. Thus today we see two diverse caricatures of the society one marching towards globalization with due respect for cross culture and the other still traditional and rigid in their attitude and approach. The sex roles are determined on the basis of social activities in which two sexes involve with different frequency mode. Thus sex stereotyped is not the product of biological discrimination alone but social conditioning too. The different communication patterns and structures based on culture and gender difference are thus caused by socialization process.

#### 3.1 Need to resolve gender-based problems

Researchers say that the society, irrespective of any culture, is male centered because of his position that remains fairly consistent. The problems at work places are mainly due to sex discrimination, for women are believed to be passive participants and sometimes incapable in handling business activities as dexterously as that of man. They are given positions in politics and business but with a dejected feeling. But these conditions are not alike everywhere, hence there is an urgent need to resolve this problem before these fluctuating opinions jeopardize the entire structure of communication.

##### 3.1.1 Choice of Diction

The choice of diction also affects the language of men and women. Undeniably women are socially restricted in expressing their views thoroughly due to limited vocabulary assigned to them. Whereas men are free to use language in any form. A touch of delicacy in a woman's speech and a blunt touch of man often lead to misunderstandings. Hence due consideration for each other's limitations can settle the issues and lead to better understanding. According to Colwill use of language negatively affects our communication and interpretation in the following ways.

- Use of masculine words to refer to females and vice-versa
- In appropriate use of titles for women and men

##### 3.1.2 Use of words discriminating sex

It happens in almost all the languages across cultures, that words discriminating sex are frequently used to evaluate the levels e.g. a lady doctor, a lady politician etc. Sometimes the synonyms used for a particular word by men and women are not understood by opposite sex belonging to the same culture. Thus communication for men and women has different purposes and different interpretations. Thus they constitute two linguistic groups and two linguistic codes. Several researchers have confirmed that women's language is different from that of men. Women's language is considered by Holmes as tentative language. Frequent use of phrases like I believe, I assume, I think are commonly

used by females, thus making their words weaker as when compared to that of men who are very firm and clear about their ideas. Thus women should give up such weak expressions in order to improve their speech.

#### **4. Impact of Intonation and Non-verbal signs**

##### *4.1 Problems related to Intonation*

Use of intonation is yet another problem for many. Different countries use different structures of intonation. Sometimes intonation converts the answer into a question e.g. "Is everything alright with him?" It is very essential to know at this stage that in cross cultural communication, the rising and falling tones i.e. intonation can change the entire tones and hence entire meaning. While offering something, using falling tone is considered impolite by the Americans. Though both Americans and Indians believe in polite exchange of words but Indians in this regard are considered impolite since they use falling tone while offering something to others. Thus intonation distorts the information transit and the problem is further intensified if it is the matter concerning the opposite sex.

##### *4.2 Desired changes due to multinational workforce*

To overcome all these problems related to culture, gender, intonation etc. a formal training in the language classes, dealing with the history and origin of the different countries along with their traditions, culture, rituals etc. is very necessary. Equally important is the study of non-verbal communication of various countries and sub groups as these untold expressions seem to convey more than 55% of the communication with varying degrees of meaning across cultures and genders. For developing global competitiveness and to be successful, Kaneda adds, you must also have patience and a "sincere desire for understanding others," no matter what business you are in. The multicultural workforce not only brings with it wide range of skills but new traditions, backgrounds, experiences, outlooks and attitudes that can affect the overall behavior of the workers on the job. In US, by 2010, immigrants will account for half of all workers from various countries. Managing this changing mix of ages, views, ethics and culture is increasingly difficult, if not managed wisely and timely.

##### *4.3 Cultural variations across the globe*

Men and women of different cultures behave differently and it should be understood in proper perspective. The people of United States usually complain right away when they are unhappy about something, its members rely mostly on verbal communication to convey their messages, whereas people from high culture context, like Japan rely less on verbal communication and more on non-verbal communication. They expect others to anticipate their needs. The men of eastern countries do not properly perceive the non-verbal messages of women of western countries. What is considered to be a greeting for one may be a social taboo for other. A very helpful talk, a direct eye contact, a touch or a warm facial expression of an American may be considered as nasty gesture by an Indian. However in serious conditions it is always safe to respect others' feelings by acquiring sufficient knowledge about other cultures and gender problems. Pointing with an index finger is a rude gesture in many cultures. Pointing out the index finger towards oneself is an insult to another person in Germany and Switzerland. The American gesture for "OK" i.e. circular gesture conveys vulgar meaning in Russia and Singapore.

At this juncture of intercultural study it is very necessary to understand cultural variations, but it is unfair to apply one's cultural meanings to other cultures. Russians exhibit less facial expressions; it however doesn't mean that they are less enthusiastic. Brazilians interrupt more, Asians love silence, Arabs speak loudly. In Libya, not looking conveys respect and looking straight at a woman is as serious as physical assault. These differences strongly affect communication at work places as the main intension of the message is not properly been registered by the listeners due to cultural bias. Our efforts will depend as much on physical cues as on verbal ones. This problem is serious for Americans as they aren't usually aware of their own non-verbal behavior and hence find problems with other cultures as well. Some of the typical non-verbal gestures are as follows:

- Canadian listeners nod to signal agreement
- Japanese nod to indicate that they have understood
- British stare deep at the speaker, blinking their eyes, to indicate understanding
- For Americans it is impolite to stare
- Canadians consider touching any part of the arm above the hand intrusive, except in intimate relationship

##### *4.3.1 Future challenges in Intercultural Communication*

In order to run the wheels of business and life smoothly, competence in intercultural communication has to be developed. Cross-cultural training programmes should be organized both at college and professional levels. But in an attempt to adopt the intercultural communication we should not lose our actual behavior, as this can lead to a bigger confusion and people suspect our motives. Hence it is important to behave natural. To become more effective

communicators across cultures and sex, Asuncion-Lande has made some suggestions like identifying one's own cultural and gender behavior, being flexible and open at heart and mind.

With the growth of technological development and the world becoming one single roof for all the nations, competence in understanding each other across cultures is becoming important day by day and thankfully media is playing a pivotal role in untangling the complexities in intercultural communication. But still a lot more research is expected to overcome these difficulties. It is a great challenge to all the upcoming scholars of intercultural communication especially between opposite sex than between cross cultures. This in turn will lead to the organizational effectiveness and progress at work places involving people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

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## Hemingway's Language Style and Writing Techniques

### in *The Old Man and the Sea*

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#### Abstract

Among many great American writers, Hemingway is famous for his objective and terse prose style. As all the novels Hemingway published in his life, *The Old Man and the Sea* typically reflects his unique writing style. The language is simple and natural on the surface, but actually deliberate and artificial. Hemingway's style is related to his experience as a journalist. The influence of his style is great all over the world. *The Old Man and the Sea* is full of facts, most of which comes from Hemingway own experience. In the forepart of the novel, they are used to show the quality of Santiago's life, and are narrated simply and naturally; while in the latter part of the novel, they are used from inside Santiago's own consciousness and form part of a whole scheme of the novel.

**Keywords:** Facts, Simplicity, Iceberg Theory

#### 1. Introduction

*The Old Man and the Sea* is undoubtedly Hemingway's masterpiece. It is a simple story about a fisherman Santiago and his battle with a great marlin. For 84 days Santiago does not catch a single fish but he does not feel discouraged. He goes far out into the sea and hooks a giant marlin. A desperate struggle ensues in which Santiago manages to kill the fish and tie it to his boat, only to find that on the way home he has to fight a more desperate struggle with some dangerous giant sharks, which eat up the marlin, leaving only a skeleton. The old man brings it home and goes to bed to dream, almost dead with exhaustion. But his struggle wins him much respect. Among many great American writers, Hemingway is famous for his objective and terse prose style. As the last novel Hemingway published in his life, *The Old Man and the Sea* typically reflects his unique writing style. This paper aims to discuss the writing style and techniques in *The Old Man and the Sea* and focuses especially on the language style and one of the important techniques—the way to use facts in his novel.

#### 2. Language Style

##### 2.1 Analyses of the Language Style

Among all Hemingway's works, *The Old Man and the Sea* is the most typical one to his unique language style. Its language is simple and natural, and has the effect of directness, clarity and freshness. This is because Hemingway always manages to choose words concrete, specific, more commonly found, more Anglo-Saxon, casual and conversational. He seldom uses adjectives and abstract nouns, and avoids complicated syntax. Hemingway's strength lies in his short sentences and very specific details. His short sentences are powerfully loaded with the tension, which he sees in life. Where he does not use a simple and short sentence, he connects the various parts of the sentence in a straightforward and sequential way, often linked by "and". In his task of creating real people, Hemingway uses dialogue as an effective device. Here is an example chosen from *The Old Man and the Sea*:

"What do you have to eat?" the boy asked.

"No, I will eat at home; do you want me to make the fire?"

"No, I will make it later on, or I may eat the rice cold."

Here we can see that such interpolations as "he said" have frequently been omitted and the words are very colloquial. Thus the speech comes to the reader as if he were listening. Hemingway has captured the immediacy of dialogue skillfully and has made the economical speech connotative. But it is good to note that Hemingway's style is deliberate and artificial, and is never as natural as it seems to be. The reasons are as follows. Firstly, in some specific moments, in order to stand out by contrast and to describe an important turning point or climax, the style is made a little different: He

took all his pain and what was left of his long gone pride and he put it against the fish's agony and the fish came over on to his side and swam gently on his side, his bill almost touching the planking of the skiff, and started to pass the boat, long, deep, wide, silver and barred with purple and interminable in the water. The language in this one-sentence paragraph is different from other parts of the novel. Kenneth Graham has commented that the sentence builds up its parts in a carefully laborious sequence—"all his pain and what was left of his strength and his long gone pride". It emulates the movement of the exhausted marlin and the physical strain of the old man. And it mounts to a heavy crescendo in the very un-prosaic inversion of adjectives—"long, deep, wide"—ending in the virtually poetic cadence, "interminable in the water."

The dialogue, too, is combined with the realistic and the artificial. In *The Old Man and the Sea*, The language style is very peculiar from Hemingway's other writings. This is because the novel is an English version of the Spanish that Santiago and Mandolin would speak in real life. Since we are meant to realize that Santiago and Mandolin could not possibly speak like this, since English is not his tongue anyway, we are more likely to accept other artificialities of the dialogue. The speakers are distanced from readers to a certain degree. And while their language taking on a king of epic dignity; it does not lose its convincingness. Even slightly strange exchanges like the following become fairly acceptable. For example:

"You're my alarm clock," the boy said.

"Age is my alarm clock," the old man said. "Why does old man wake so early? Is it to have one longer day?"

"I don't know," the boy said. "All I know is that young boys sleep late and hard."

"I can remember it," the old man said. "I'll waken you in time."

The simple sentences and the repeated rhythms hit at the profundities that the surface of the language tries to ignore. Its simplicity is highly suggestive and connotative, and often reflects the strong undercurrent of emotion. Indeed, the more closely the reader watches, the less rough and simple the characters appear. In *Death in the Afternoon*, Hemingway uses an effective metaphor to describe his writing style. If a writer of the prose knows enough about what he is writing about, he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only 1/8 of it being above water. Among all the works of Hemingway, the saga of Santiago is thought as the most typical one to this Iceberg Theory. The author seldom expresses his own feelings directly, nor does he make any comments or explanations. On the contrary, he tries to narrate and describe things objectively and blend his own feelings harmoniously to the natural narration and description. This gives readers a picture of compression, from which, the 1/8 of iceberg above water, they can learn the implied meaning and feelings of the author, 7/8 of the iceberg under water. When Hemingway said of this story, "I tried to make a real old man, a real sea and real sharks," he then went on to say, "But if I made them good and true enough they would mean many things." So this novel has a great conveyed by a compressed action. The core of the novel's action is fishing. To the hero, fishing is not simply of contest in life. It contains profound philosophic meaning. In addition, two details, the baseball match and the hand wrestling with the Negro, like fishing, symbolize the contest in life. They compensate and enrich the inner meaning of the main plot of fishing. So the simplicity of the novel is highly suggestive. So Hemingway has formed narrative and dialogue, which though natural and simple on the surface, is actually deliberated and artificial. It combines elements that are realistic with elements that are stylized and heightened.

### 2.2 The Forming of the Language Style

How Hemingway has formed such a writing style? The reason is related to his own experiences. "His use of short sentences and paragraphs and vigorous and positive language, and the deliberate avoidance of gorgeous adjectives are some of the traces of his early journalistic practices." After leaving school, he went to the Kansas City Star, which was one of the best newspapers in America at that time. He served as its eager and energetic reporter. As a journalist, Hemingway trained himself in the economy of expression. He once said that, during his working in Star, he had to learn to use simple sentences, which is very useful to him; and that the experience of working as a journalist would not do harm to a young writer, instead it is very helpful if he could cast it off timely. He laid stress on "speaking" with facts and objected groundless concoction in writing. His descriptions of details are full of factuality, and are as precise as news reports.

### 2.3 The Influence of the Language Style

The influence of Hemingway's language style is great. In the latter part of his life, Hemingway was known as "Papa Hemingway". It refers mainly to his contribution to the development of a new writing style in America—the colloquial style. A critic named Storm Jameson discussing "The Craft of the Novelist" in the January 1934 issue of *The English Review*, she advanced an explanation of Hemingway's popularity: It is this simplicity, this appeal to out crudest interested, which explains Hemingway's success...In English at least his success has been largely with the intellectuals. They have praised his simplicity, his directness...And Hemingway's influence as a stylist was "neatly expressed in the praise of the Noble Prize Committee about 'his powerful style—forming mastery of the art' of writing modern fiction."

### 3. The Writing Techniques—the Way to Use Facts

#### 3.1 *The Facts Are Selected*

Apart from the language style, which *The Old Man and the Sea* is famous for, the writing techniques in this novel are also worth paying close attention to. A very important one is the way to use facts. The main events of the story seem to be based on a real incident, which is described by Hemingway in an article about fishing in the Gulf Stream in *Esquire* for April 1936. So the novel is full of facts, such as the habit of fish, the technique of the novel lies in the way to use these facts.

Firstly the facts are selected. “Hemingway’s old man, boy, sea, fish, and sharks are not so much built up in our minds, detail by detail, facts by facts, as drive into our mind by the force and the sympathy with which the author himself shares in their imaginary existence.” Like any realist, he relies on selection. When the giant marlin finally surfaces, his tail “was higher than a big scythe blade and very pale lavender above the dark blue water.” Sargasso weed is bleached and yellow by day; Tuna are silver when they jump out of the water, but blue-backed and fold-sides when swimming. Hemingway never describes them excessively, but chooses some effective ones. He uses them with a sense of how colors shift and change in their relationship. Without selection, there can be no intensity, and compression.

#### 3.2 *The Facts Are Used as a Device to Make the Fictional World Accepted*

Secondly, the facts are used as a device to make the fictional world accepted. The novel is not simple a manual for us to study the technique to catch a fish or how to survive in a boat. The author tries to implicate people’s imagination in what is happening by appealing to our love practical knowledge. This shows “the facts are fundamentally a device, a technique of reassuring our sense of everyday values.” So they can help to make us accept more readily what the author has invented and made more dramatic than in everyday life. Still take the use of color as example: “The clouds over the land now rose like mountains and the coast was only a long green line with the gray-blue hills behind it. The water was a dark blue now, so dark that it was almost purple. As he looked down into it he saw the red sifting of the plankton in the dark water and the strange light the sun made now.” These facts show readers the process of fishing, which mostly comes from the author’s own experience. From these facts, which are vivid, precise and terse, readers can learn a lot about how to catch a fish and can also feel as if they themselves were catching a fish. Then they will have the sense that what the author describes is real and believable. Therefore, as Kenneth Graham has said many facts in the novel about fishing and about the sea have a double function: They satisfy people’s sense of the real world. And this is what underlies Hemingway’s famous statement that his intention was always to convey to the reader “the way it was.”

### 4. Conclusion

Hemingway’s language in *The Old Man and the Sea* is simple and natural on the surface, but actually deliberate and artificial. “The language is rarely emotional. Rather, it controls emotions: it holds them in.” It is unique. Now “Hemingway style” is widely used to refer to the kind of prose writing which is characterized by simplicity, directness, clarity, freshness and naturalness.

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## A Study of Two Functions of Modal Auxiliary Verbs in English, with Special Reference to Can, May and Must

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### Abstract

Many linguisticians in the English research field have detailedly illustrated all kinds of usage of English grammars and roles. However, in the modal auxiliary verbs of English, they have also stated their opinions, but deontic modality and epistemic modality have not been completely studied. Especially, how we transfer of deontic function to epistemic function, and the metaphorical extension in the process by the force dynamics between them is an extremely important aspect. The problem aroused my interest to study. In order to study further language continuous development, I begin from expounding the metaphorical extension of the epistemic function from deontic function, and then infer my own opinions as the conclusion of the thesis.

**Keywords:** Modal auxiliary verb, Deontic modality, Epistemic modality, Metaphorical extension

### 1. Introduction

Language is systematically grounded in human cognition, and cognitive linguistics seeks to show exactly how. The conceptual system that emerges from everyday human experiences has been proved in recent researches to be the basis of natural language in a wide range of areas.

Modal auxiliaries have two aspects of function: deontic and epistemic. The basic meanings of modal auxiliaries in English typically convey some indication of the speaker's perspective or attitude toward the situation or state of affairs being described.

Epistemic modality refers to the perspective that is personally determined in the situation, and deontic modality indicates what is socially determined. But, there is a close relationship between epistemic and deontic. I tell you about the transfer of deontic function to epistemic function, and the metaphorical extension in the process by the force dynamics between them.

In long teaching practice, I have known those modal auxiliary verbs before, are all the basic usage, but I can't touch their more deep gradation, and then further to study them. This time, the meaning and purpose of my study are to let more and more learners to observe two important functions in modal auxiliary verbs in English and master their usages and roles. At the same time, let them master the more deep gradation from deontic function to the extension of epistemic function and the metaphorical extension of force dynamics from deontic modality to illuminate them.

So in the thesis, first I definite two functions in modal auxiliary verbs, and then further expound their scales of deontic function and epistemic function of Can, May and Must respectively, finally expound the metaphorical extension of the epistemic function from deontic function, and then infer my own opinions as the conclusion of the thesis.

Of course, in the expounding process, I use the scientific theories as a criterion, in accordance with the facts.

### 2. Definitions of two functions in modal auxiliary verbs

In the many English grammar books, each of the researchers has completely illustrated their own opinions and viewpoints. From the book of Explaining English Grammar, George Yule tells us the modal auxiliary verbs in English have two aspects of function: deontic (called root) and epistemic modality. Deontic is objective, and epistemic is subjective. As the below:

- ① deontic: objective – general view or logical view
- ② epistemic: subjective – personal inference or judgment

Here are some examples, and they show objective and subjective between deontic and epistemic.

- (1) a. You must have one of these cakes.  
b. You must be wrong.

① deontic: objective — You are forced to have one of these cakes in this situation.

② epistemic: subjective — I am compelled by some evidences to conclude that you are wrong or right.

The modal auxiliary verbs in English typically convey some indication of the speaker's perspective or attitude toward the situation or state of affairs being described. That perspective can be based on what is known or what is socially determined in the situation. So what is personally known is called epistemic modality, and what is socially determined is described as deontic (called root) modality.

What does the epistemic refer to? Epistemic uses often sound like deductions or conclusions made by the speaker. They can express the relationship in a simple assertion. However, they can also add some indication of their perspective on the likelihood of that relationship being the case. Here are some examples.

- (2) a. Tom is at home at 12 o'clock.  
b. Tom must be at home at 12 o'clock.  
c. Tom may be at home at 12 o'clock.

That assessment is based on the speaker's deductions, from what is known. Modal forms used with this function are interpreted in terms of epistemic necessity (2b) or epistemic possibility (2c). It is important for us to remember that it is the speaker's (or writer's) perspective that is being presented.

What does deontic indicate? Deontic function is not based on the speaker's knowledge of facts, but on the speaker's awareness of what is socially determined. Deontic modal are typically used socially and have to do with obligation and permission. Creating an obligation or giving permission is acts that are based on social power of some kind. For example, in the situation, Tom goes to the library in the afternoon. Speakers can express the relationship as a simple observation. However, if the speaker has some socially-based power to control that relationship, then the speaker's perspective can be marked with the deontic function to indicate the use of that power to determine the relationship. Here are some examples.

- (3) a. Tom goes to the library in the afternoon.  
b. Tom must go to the library in the afternoon.  
c. Tom may be go to the library in the afternoon.

The modals indicate the speaker's perspective on whether the event simply occurs (3a), is required to occur (3b), or is permitted to occur (3c). The speaker's social power is often based on some established social relationship (e.g. parent — child or boss – worker). But, between deontic and epistemic, there is a clear parallel between the major distinctions made in English. For example, if I see someone buying a lot of beer at the store, I can come to the strong conclusion expressed in (4a) or the weaker conclusion in (4b).

- (4) a. He must drink a lot of beer. (=necessary)  
b. He may drink a lot of beer. (=possible)

These epistemic uses are knowledge-based and can be paraphrased as 'necessary that' (must) and 'possible that' (may).

If a parent wants a child to drink some milk, it can be expressed as a strong obligation as in (5). Alternatively, if the parent is responding to the child's request for something to drink, it can be expressed with the weaker obligation, as in (5b).

- (5) a. You must drink some milk. (=necessary)  
b. You may drink some milk. (=possible)

These deontic modality uses are socially-based, given the general social authority of parents in determining their child's behavior. In these examples, the modals can be paraphrased as 'necessary for' (must) and 'possible for' (may). These are their major distinctions.

It is very important for us to remember that epistemic modality is a kind of deductions, which comes from a speaker or a writer, and deontic is a kind of requirements from a speaker or a writer.

But, in Mood and Modality, Palmer also illustrates the deontic and epistemic modality. So it says, deontic modality is an objectivity, and epistemic modality is a subjectivity. English has a basic of weak and strong epistemic modality, so it seems also have a basic system of weak and strong deontic modality. As the below:

- ① deontic: objectivity — at least of directives, comes from the directive

② epistemic: subjectivity — show a performative, come from a subjective judgment

Here are some examples of the directive and performative.

- (6) a. John must come tomorrow.  
b. He may be at home today.

In (6a), the notions of possibility and necessity are involved. When ‘must’ is used for laying an obligation, as expressing deontic necessity, the speaker imposes the possibility or necessity of coming tomorrow upon his hearer. It is a strong deontic modality. In (6b), there is an obvious form of giving permission, with epistemic modality.

Palmer says that subjectivity might be considered an essential feature of modality and that epistemic modality, at least, is always subjective.

Palmer further illustrated the relationship and distinguish ability between the epistemic and deontic modalities of the modal verbs ‘may’ and ‘must’.

First, the relation between ‘may’ and ‘must’ can be clearly stated in terms of possibility and necessity. They express what is epistemically possible and what is epistemically ‘necessary’. For example,

- (7) a. He may be there.  
b. He may not be there.  
c. He can’t be there.

In (7b), it says, ‘it is possible that he is not there’, in (7c), it says, ‘it is not possible that he is there’. Yet there is no similar set for ‘must’. Instead, for a positive judgment about a negative proposition. For example,

- (8) a. He must be there.  
b. He can’t be there.  
c. He may not be there.

The same forms are used. This is easily explained in terms of logical relations between possibility and necessity since ‘not possible’ is equivalent to ‘necessary not’ and ‘not necessary’ to ‘possible not’. But English uses only the ‘can’ and ‘may’ forms and this may be significant.

A second way of approaching the meaning of “may” and “must” is simply in terms of the kind of judgment being made, and in particular between speculation and deduction. This is clearly suggested in the comments of Coates: In its most normal usage epistemic ‘must’ convey the speaker’s confidence in the truth of what he is saying, based on a deduction from facts known to him (which may or may not be specified).

‘May’ and ‘Might’ are the modals of epistemic possibility, expressing the speaker’s lack of confidence in the proposition expressed.

Now, next we’ll again study by Sweetser, she analyzes the deontic and epistemic modality. Historically, the English modals developed from non-modal meanings to “deontic” modal meanings, and later still broadened to include the epistemic readings as well. Her proposal is that deontic-modal meanings are extended to the epistemic domain precisely because we generally use the language of the external world to apply to the internal mental world, which is metaphorically structured as parallel to that external world. As the below:

- ① Deontic : to be treated as lexical predicates involving force or obligation, and permission or ability as an objectivity  
② Epistemic: to be treated as combinations of logical operators, and denotes necessity, probability, or possibility as a subjectivity

She thinks that deontic is viewed as referring specifically to permission giving or to social duty, and epistemic-modal senses is based on an objective understanding of logical certainty or possibility. Other researchers think epistemic modality binds the speaker to believe the proposition, while deontic modality binds the subject to do the action expressed in the proposition. Here are two examples:

- (9) a. You must come home today.  
b. You must have been home last night.

In (9a), the speaker believes to do the action in the proposition, so it is a deontic modality, while in (9b), the speaker believes the proposition, so it is a epistemic modality. However, they all think that the ambiguity of modal expressions between deontic and epistemic senses has long been recognized. Linguists have characterized as deontic those meanings which denote real-world obligation, permission, or ability; and as epistemic those which denote necessity, probability, or possibility. For examples;

- (10) a. Joan must be at home by ten. (Mother won’t let her stay out any later.)

b. Joan must be at home already. (I see her coat.)

In (10a), it indicates a deontic modality. It comes from an objective condition. In (10b), it indicates an epistemic modality. It comes from a subjective condition.

Sweetser thinks we need an analysis of deontic and epistemic modality which will in some way make natural their clear, close, crosslinguistic semantic relationship.

In the sections that follow, I will use the distinction between epistemic and deontic modality to explore a consistent difference in the use of each modal. Individual modals have other distinct meanings and these too will be discussed and illustrated in context.

Having noted the basic meaning distinctions in the uses of modal verbs, we shall explain, in the following sections, the core meaning of each modal verb shows how that core meaning is interpreted in different circumstances. In helping us make sense of modals, it is important to encourage us to notice the context or circumstances in which those modal forms are used.

### 3. Deontic function of Can, May and Must

#### 3.1 Can

After we have confirmed the two functions of modal auxiliary verbs, we should study the aspect of deontic function to analyze how the specific context influences the interpretation of each deontic modal verb.

In most grammar texts, they list three meanings for the modal verb 'can'. They are usually identified as 'ability', 'permission' and 'possibility'. Here are some examples.

- (11) a. Tom can ride a bike.  
b. He can speak Japanese.
- (12) Son: Can I go swimming now?  
Dad: No, you have lots of things to do.
- (13) Student: Mr. Li, can I choose another topic to write the composition?  
Teacher: Yes, you can choose it freely.
- (14) You can do anything you would like to do.

In (11), the individual potentiality enables someone to do it, and an agent has the potential to perform actions. There is typically an inference of ability, either natural or acquired. Most of the time, the agent is human and the action is physical.

In (12) and (13), the potential for an event to occur is controlled by the person having social authority. Requests for permission are addressed to, and granted by, the one with social power at that moment. These examples often occur between teachers and students, bosses and workers, and parents and children, etc.

And in (14), it indicates the source of that potential is in the social power of one individual relative to another. It is important to remember that these uses in the sentences all have 'potential' in common, and the differences result from their different circumstances. Next, there is another permission, and it refers to little potential. For example.

- (15) a. Can I leave early today if we aren't too busy?  
b. Well, you can, but there's lots of work to be done.

In such cases, it creates impression of less imposition and hence greater politeness, as in (15a). It also marks less likelihood of social permission being given, as in (15b).

Generally, the core concept which these uses have in common is about 'potential'. The differences result from the way in which that 'potential' is perceived in different circumstances. But it is not the personal potential for action that is being considered, but the potential for some social transaction.

#### 3.2 May

In the modal auxiliary verbs, 'may' has two main uses. One of them is socially – oriented (deontic) and has to do with permission.

It comes from the deontic modality, which involves social authority having the power to create or prevent the possibility of an event, hence the 'asking permission' interpretation of the below and the 'giving permission' interpretation of the below. Here are some examples.

- (16) a. May I take one subject of these in a day?  
b. Well, you may only register for two classes.

- (17) a. May I smoke here?  
b. Yes. Customers may smoke in designated areas only.

In (16), (17), the socially – oriented (deontic) uses involve some social authority having the power to create or prevent the possibility of an event. These types of socially-oriented uses are becoming much less common in everyday spoken English and tend to be associated with formal or official usage. In casual versions of the sentences in (16), ‘can’ would be more frequent. Thus, in our daily life, the child tries to use ‘Can I leave?’ with its never permission meaning. The parent responds with an ability interpretation ‘ I m sure you can’ , and then insists on the older use of ‘may’ for permission ( but you may not).

However, when the source of ‘may’ is human authority or social regulations, it is a deontic modality. The modality is often used to be interpreted as ‘permission’.

Palmer said the notions of possibility in ‘may’ may be interpreted as expressing deontic possibility. For example,

- (18) a. You may come tomorrow.  
b. We may finish the work in two days.

The speaker imposes the possibility of ‘coming tomorrow’ or ‘finishing the work in two days’ upon his hearer. (In colloquial speech, ‘can’ is more common for permission, but ‘may’ still survives.)

But, Sweetser says that the majority of the deontic modals refer to various forces, which is reasonable, since we recognize many different varieties of force in the sociophysical world. For example:

- (19) John may go.

It indicates that John is not barred by (my or some other) authority from going. It is a deontic modality.

Generally speaking, the deontic of ‘may’ is based on human authority or social regulations to be decided in different circumstances. The core concept of ‘may’ has either permission or possibility, or relative remoteness. And the deontic of ‘may’ is viewed as referring specifically to permission giving or to social duty.

### 3.3 *Must*

The distinction between the epistemic and deontic uses of English modals is very clear in the case of ‘must’. One of the core concepts is ‘necessity’, with socially-oriented (deontic) necessity being interpreted as an obligation. In socially – oriented uses, there is a range of imposition from strong obligation, which can be interpreted in terms of an order or even a legal requirement. Here are two examples,

- (20) a. You must complete the task in three days.  
b. You must concentrate on one thing at a time.

Of course, in socially-oriented (deontic) uses, there is also a weak obligation which comes simply from the speaker’s sense of the importance of some action. And then, the weak obligation sense of ‘necessity’ allows speakers to express self-imposed obligations with first person subjects, as in (21).

- (21) a. I must remember to feed the cat later.  
b. I must try harder next time.

Conceptually, the imposition of an obligation tends to apply to present and future actions (rather than states). It also involves animate subjects (typically humans) who are capable of performing those actions. The obligation meaning of ‘must’ is often found in non-personal warnings and rules of the type. For example,

- (22) a. Door must be closed when machine is in operation.  
b. Students must pay course fees before attending classes.

An interesting development in contemporary English is the use of ‘must’ in statements that indicate a desire to meet some social obligation, but which are actually interpreted as vague arrangements rather than fixed events. As illustrated in (23), these expressions seem to carry the meaning that the social obligation is recognized as necessary, but the actual occurrence of the event that will fulfill the obligation is not to be fixed. The social obligation is being met by expressing awareness of the social obligation.

- (23) a. You must come to see us one of these days  
b. We must get together for lunch sometime.

English is not alone in having expressions of social obligation (without specific arrangements) and we can quickly recognize the use of these types of expressions once they are explained or clearly illustrated, even if there are very complicated conditions.

Palmer said ‘must’, when used for laying an obligation, as expressing deontic necessity. In saying ‘You must come tomorrow’, the speaker imposes the necessity of ‘coming tomorrow’ upon his hearer. He also said the status of conditional uses of the modals is more problematic, for they are not always clearly distinct from deontic modality, in the strictly subjective sense. But other researchers think deontic can comes to refer to logical compatibility between a person’s or the world’s state and some events, while deontic must refers to logical necessity of the occurrence of some events, given the state of the world.

#### 4. Epistemic function of Can, May and Must

##### 4.1 Can

Now we will analyze the usages of these modal verbs from epistemic functions .Most grammar texts list three ‘meanings’ for the modal verb ‘can’. One of them is usually identified as ‘possibility’. It is an epistemic function. Here are some examples,

- (24) a. It can sometimes get very cold here in winter.  
 b. A visit to the dentist can be frightening.  
 c. I am sure these problems can be solved.

These types of constructions express epistemic modality. They will tend to be used when there is a desire to convey the potential for an event taking place, even when the speaker is not sure of how or when the potential will be realized. The core concept in common is also about ‘potential’. The differences result from the way in which that ‘potential’ is perceived in different circumstances.

Palmer says that it refers to there is a subjectivity. It was suggested earlier that subjectivity might be considered an essential feature of modality and that epistemic modality, at least, is always subjective. In saying ‘ He can’t be there.’ The possibility notion is also clearly illustrated in the negative relationships. It expresses ‘it is possible that he is not there.’ But, Sweetser says positive can is almost unusable in an epistemic sense. But its negative and interrogative forms are quite acceptable (cf. “Can that be true?”). Another example, ‘You can’t have lifted fifty pounds’, and so on.

As though these researchers have many point-views to the epistemic functions of ‘can’, but they all illustrated the potential of ‘can’ has its possibility and subjectivity and play a role in different circumstances.

##### 4.2 May

In the epistemic functions, the knowledge-oriented uses of ‘may’, indicates that an even is judged to have an equal possibility of occurring or not. This equivalence is sometimes stated and draws attention to the ‘weak possibility’ interpretation associated with epistemic ‘may’. Here are some examples,

- (25) a. Careful, that gun may be loaded . (it is possible that it is loaded.)  
 b. Our flight may be delayed.  
 c. They may come later or they may not.  
 d. We may be old- fashioned, but we believe in good manners.

There is also a third interpretation of ‘may’ which happens when the speaker wishes to acknowledge the possibility of some event or state of affairs being the case, but not necessarily relevant for the current discussion. This type of ‘possibility’ is interpreted as a concession, and is often followed by a ‘but’ clause. It can usually be paraphrased by a clause beginning with ‘although’. Here are some examples.

- (26) a. You may have good reasons, but that doesn’t make it legal.  
 b. He may be old, but he’s still fit. (Although he’s old, he’s still fit.)  
 c. Although I may be old, I’m not crazy.

As before illustrated, the epistemic is based on the speaker’s deductions from what is known. Modal forms used with this function are interpreted in terms of epistemic possibility. For example,

- (27) a. Mike may go to the shop in the morning.  
 b. He may drink a lot of beer.

These epistemic uses are knowledge-based and can be paraphrased as ‘possible that’ (may).But other researchers think the analysis of the epistemic-modal senses is based on an objective understanding of logical certainty or possibility. This epistemic analysis takes the premises in the speaker’s mind. For example.

- (28) John may be there.

“I am not barred by my premises from the conclusion that he is there.”

On the other hand, the epistemic function of 'may' has some differences on relative remoteness from the point of utterance. The remoteness of possibility interpretation of 'may' results in a sense of 'uncertainty' about the likelihood of an event taking place.

#### 4.3 *Must*

Next we study the epistemic function of 'must'. In the modal verbs in English, the distinction between the epistemic and deontic uses of English modals is very clear in the case of 'must'. One of the core concepts in both meanings is 'necessary', with knowledge-oriented necessity being interpreted as a conclusion. Generally, in its knowledge-oriented uses, 'must' indicates that some conclusion is necessary, given the speaker's assessment of what is known. That conclusion has the status of an inference and signals an assumption that no other explanation is available. Conceptually, that conclusion tends to be about past and present states, as well as actions. It can refer to non-animate subjects and can involve events viewed retrospectively (with perfect aspect) or internally (with progressive aspect). Here are some examples.

- (29) a. Look at that house! Those people must have a lot of money.  
 b. It must be hot in there with no air-conditioning.  
 c. Oh no, a traffic jam. There must have been an accident.  
 d. The computer is on, so someone must be using it.

Palmer thinks that in many languages it is possible to make at least two kinds of epistemic judgment, a 'weak' one and a 'strong' one. A typical example is English with one of its modal verbs 'must', and this will be considered first. The relation can be clearly stated in terms of possibility and necessity. They express what is epistemically 'possible' and what is epistemically 'necessary', although the word 'necessary' itself is not used in an epistemic sense in ordinary language. As in (29), the meaning of 'must' is simply a kind of judgment being made, and in particular between speculation and deduction. This is clearly suggested in the comments of Coates: "In its most normal usage, epistemic 'must' conveys the speaker's confidence in the truth of what he is saying, based on a deduction from facts known to him (which may or may not be specified)".

Other researchers think that the analysis of the epistemic-modal senses is based on an objective understanding of logical certainty or possibility. That epistemic uses of the modals result from our understanding the logical necessity of a proposition in terms of the forces which give rise to the sociophysical necessity of the corresponding event in the real world. Here is an example.

- (30) You must be Mary's sister.

The speaker did not really mean that somehow the proposition must be true because some real-world causes have brought about the relevant state of affairs, but rather that he was obliged to 'conclude' that it was true because the available informational premises caused him to reason thus.

### 5. Epistemic function extended from deontic function

The English modals developed from non-modal meanings to 'deontic' modal meanings, and later still broadened to include the epistemic readings as well. Shepherd's work gives some evidences that creoles first develop their expression of deontic modality before going on to extend that expression fully to the epistemic domain. And studies of child language have revealed that children acquire the deontic senses of modal verbs earlier than the epistemic ones.

Past historical changes in this domain, then, were shaped by a general semantic linkage which probably has inherent psycholinguistic motivation. Sweetser's proposal is that deontic-modal meanings are extended to the epistemic domain precisely because we generally use the language of the external world to apply to the internal mental world, which is metaphorically structured as parallel to that external world.

The present study will thus argue that modal verbs do not have two separate unrelated senses, but rather show an extension of the basic deontic-sense to the epistemic domain – an extension which is strongly motivated by the surrounding linguistic system. Many recent linguistic works seem to treat English modal verbs as essentially cases of homonymy rather than ambiguity, tacitly assuming that (whatever the historical development may have been) epistemic and deontic modality are synchronically unrelated. Deontic-modal meanings are often treated as lexical predicates involving force or obligation, while epistemic readings are treated as combinations of logical operators.

Talmy has suggested that the semantics of deontic modality is best understood in terms of forces dynamics, that is in terms of our linguistic treatment of forces and barriers in general.

Let us now explore the results of transferring this view to the epistemic domain. Thus deontic 'can' comes to refer to logical compatibility between a person's (or the world's) state and some events, while deontic 'must' refers to logical necessity of the occurrence of some events, given the state of the world. A slightly more promising line of explanation is that suggested in passing by Lyons: namely that epistemic uses of the modals result from our understanding the logical

necessity of a proposition in terms of the forces which give rise to the sociophysical necessity of the corresponding event in the real world. But this too falls down when closely examined: in uttering the example (31), the speaker did not really mean that somehow the proposition must be true because some real-world causes have brought about the relevant state of affairs, but rather that he was obliged to ‘conclude’ that it was true because the available informational premises caused him to reason thus.

(31) (Look at the girl) “You must be Mr. John’s girlfriend.”

Thus (31) does not express the speaker’s compulsion to state that the addressee has a certain identity, but his compulsion to ‘conclude’ that this is the case. Phrases like “I must say” or “I must tell you.” seemingly have modals applied to the act of speaking, but, in fact, have a completely different meaning from epistemic modals.

Finally, Antinucci and Parisi have suggested that ‘must’ has two readings analyzable . For examples.

(32) You must come home. (deontic)

CAUSE X / Speaker (BIND (YOU COME HOME) )

(33) You must have been home last night. (epistemic)

CAUSE (X) (BIND (BELIEVE (SPEAKER) (YOU BE HOME) ) )

This analysis proposes that epistemic modality binds the speaker to believe the proposition, while deontic modality binds the subject to do the action expressed in the proposition. Sweetser trusts that the rudimentary analysis of deontic modality has given some idea of the elements of her proposed general analysis of modality.

The deontic modality can be applied to the epistemic world. If deontic modality is viewed as referring specifically to permission giving or to social duty, for example, there would appear to be little chance of extending such an analysis to epistemic modality. But we need to find a motivated semantic connection between the epistemic domain of reasoning and judgment and the domain of external sociophysical modality. That evidence gives us a motivating background against which to set a more specific metaphorical mapping between epistemic and deontic modality. Given that the epistemic world is understood in terms of the sociophysical world, we can see why general sociophysical potentiality, and specifically social permission, should be the sociophysical modality chosen as analogous to possibility in the world of reasoning.

‘May’ is an absent potential Barrier in the sociophysical world, and the epistemic, ‘may’ is the force-dynamically parallel case in the world of reasoning. The meaning of epistemic ‘may’ would thus be that there is no barrier to the speaker’s process of reasoning from the available premises to the conclusion expressed in the sentence qualified by ‘may’. I think that an epistemic modality is metaphorically viewed as that real-world modality which is its closest parallel in force-dynamic structure.

Sweetser also designed a diagram that might schematically represent the image-schematic structure of ‘may’. But it is representing a potential barrier which is not actually in place. From the structure of the schema, this assumes that a basic causal event-structure is mapped from our understanding of social and physical causality onto our understanding of our reasoning processes. Once such a mapping is assumed to exist, it is clearly natural to map the meaning of ‘may’ onto epistemic possibility, and not (for example) onto epistemic certainty, because there is some very general topological structure shared by the two senses of ‘may’.

Of course, we must know forces and barriers as premise in the mental world, since no other kinds of obstruction/force exist in that world. The majority of the deontic modals refer to various forces, which is reasonable, since we recognize many different varieties of force in the sociophysical world. Next I shall contrast the use of a modal in its real- world sense (a) with its corresponding usage in the epistemic domain (b).

May

(34a) John may go.

“John is not barred by (my or some other) authority from going.”

(34b) John may be there.

“I am not barred by my premises from the conclusion that he is there.”

Must

(35a) You must come home by ten. (Mom said so. )

“The direct force (of Mom’s authority) compels you to come home by ten.”

(35b) You must have been home last night.

“The available (direct) evidence compels me to the conclusion that you were home.”

This epistemic analysis of (35b) takes the premises in the speaker's mind as parallel to the force of authority in (35a). Note that the usual 'reluctance' which is assumed to exist in the compelled person in (35a) has no counterpart in (35b). Such a contrast is a natural consequence of the differences between the sociophysical world and the epistemic world. In the real world, we don't usually use force unless we need to overcome reluctance on the part of the person we are forcing. But we do not view our mental processes as being affected by such reluctance, or by anything other than the available premises. Furthermore, in the real world, force is usually resented by the victim because freedom is valued. But in the world of reasoning, we wish to have our conclusions forced or restricted by premises (not by external sociophysical forces like threats) because this gives us more certainties within our belief system, and knowledge is valued. Here are two examples.

Can

(36a) I can lift fifty pounds.

"Some potentiality enables me to lift 50 lbs.

(36b) You can't have lift fifty pounds.

"Some set of premises dis-enables me from concluding that you lifted 50lbs.

Positive 'can' is almost unusable in an epistemic sense. But its negative and interrogative forms are quite acceptable (cf. "Can that be true?") and have the reading of questioned or negated epistemic enablement on the part of the speaker.

Furthermore, Sweetser thinks that modal semantics is from a pragmatic interpretation. Pragmatic factors will influence a hearer's interpretation of a particular uttered modal as operating in one domain or the other. Although between deontic and epistemic contrast might profitably be viewed as polysemy, the difference between the imposing and describing uses of modals should be rather considered as a pragmatic generalization. If a modal verb simply expresses the application of some particular modality towards the event or action described in a sentence, pragmatic factors will determine what appropriate entity is understood as imposing the modality, and upon what entity it is imposed. For examples. In saying "You must be home by ten," a parent could impose an obligation on a child, or an older sibling could report the obligation imposed by the parent. In saying "John can have three cookies," I could be granting permission or listing the maximum allowance given to him by his new diet.

For epistemic modality, the story is simpler than for deontic modality. In the epistemic world, only premises count as forces or barriers. The only kind of event is a logical conclusion (or the verification of a theory); and it even has to be the speaker's own conclusion, because the force-dynamic structure of other people's reasoning processes is not readily accessible to us. Sometimes there seems to be a feeling that our reasoning process is a rather general one, which our interlocutor may share – but the speaker's own reasoning process is always the primary subject of epistemic modality.

Pragmatic factors explain why modals can be used either to impose or to describe real-world modality, while only description of epistemic modalities is possible. Sociophysical modalities can be imposed by speakers-epistemic obligations and forces cannot be imposed by anything but premises. Thus a performative use of sociophysical modality (doing by describing) is natural, while it is impossible for the epistemic modalities. Epistemic-modal sentences thus lack the multiple ambiguities inherent in the pragmatic interpretation of real-world modality: there is no possible doubt as to the nature of the mental modality's imposer and imposee.

Sweetser has elsewhere given reasons why she thinks the deontic /epistemic contrast is not best treated as two purely pragmatically conditioned interpretations of a single semantics, but rather as a motivated polysemy relationship. One reason is that the metaphorical mapping involved appears to be a linguistic convention: it is a fact about the semantics of English that these specific lexical items bear both these related senses. It is likewise true that such a polysemy is crosslinguistically common. But it is not the case (as we might expect if the modals were simply monosemous) that all deontic modals must/can have epistemic uses – this is neither historically true for the English modals nor a crosslinguistic universal. Of course, the application of real world modalities to the epistemic domain is not just modality, but causality in general, has extended uses in the epistemic and speech-act domains.

## 6. Conclusion

As above we have already analyzed the modal auxiliary verbs in English that have two aspects of function: deontic (called root) and epistemic modality. Deontic is objective, and epistemic is subjective. But the ambiguity of modal expressions between deontic and epistemic senses has long been recognized. Linguists have characterized as deontic those meanings which denote real-world obligation, or possibility.

The analysis of linguistic modality as being generalized or extended from the real-world domain to the domains of reasoning. The advantage of such an approach is that allows us to unify our account of the contrast between deontic and epistemic senses of the modal verbs. Sweetser emphasized that her proposed analysis is also coherent with the historical and developmental linguistic evidence, which suggests that an extension from the sociophysical domain to the epistemic domain would be normal, while an extension in the opposite direction would be unnatural.

Talmy's approach to deontic modality and causality in terms of forces and barriers has also given us a way to look at deontic-modal senses which can be extended to the epistemic. Attempts to find single superordinate analyses which include both deontic and epistemic modal meanings have proven unsuccessful. But the problem is removed by taking into account our understanding of mental processes as involving forces and barriers analogous to those involved in "real-world" physical and social interactions. Without taking into account this background metaphor, trying to unify deontic- and epistemic-modal meaning is like trying to find the common semantic features of "optimism" and "pink sunglasses" without basing our analysis on the knowledge that physical sight is a primary metaphor for world-view in the mental domain. But given the priority of the real world, and the structuring of the epistemic in terms of that prior world, it then follows naturally that the deontic understanding of modality will be readily extended to apply in all the worlds.

Among current semantic theories, Fauconnier's concept of "mental spaces" is particularly useful for an understanding of these multi-domain ambiguities. Fauconnier would say that the three domains I have discussed (content, epistemic, and speech act) are three mental spaces, and that certainty is the counterpart in the epistemic domain of compulsion in the real-world domain, while epistemic possibility is the counterpart of deontic possibility or permission.

But Sweetser thinks the basic semantic analyses of the modals which she has proposed is a very simple one. It would not extend so easily into the epistemic domain if it explicitly mentioned a complex set of possible identities for real-world imposers and targets of modalities. Rather, it leaves these identities to pragmatic interpretation. She considers this to be a further advantage of her analysis, since the semantics of the modals appears to be indeterminate in this area.

As was mentioned above, however, researchers or specialists or linguists, they have a common viewpoint, which in the two functions of the modal auxiliary verbs, that the deontic understanding of modality will be readily extended to apply to a real-world, that is the epistemic modality as an extension of deontic modality. I think in understanding the aspect of the function, it is one of the most important aspects of the modal verbs. I believe, in the usages of the function in the future, we will further expand the domain and more study the mass of metaphorically structured polysemy data; attempt to grasp the general idea of connections between deontic and epistemic modality.

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## Investigating the Influence of Proficiency and Gender on the Use of Selected Test-Wisness Strategies in Higher Education

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### Abstract

This study investigated the relative frequency of seven TW strategies among Iranian EFL students to find out probable relationship(s) between test-wisness, proficiency and gender. To do so, out of 138 participants, a total number of 80 undergraduate EFL students from Shahid Chamran University were chosen and divided on the basis of their proficiency scores into four cells of 20 individuals (High/Low Proficient Male/Female). All of them were required to sit for the second exam after two weeks periods from the first experiment. They took a test of TW comprised of 50 items in which seven selected TW strategies were incorporated. Data analysis showed significant differences between the two groups, that is, high proficient groups outperformed their low proficient counterparts. In other words, more proficient students were more test-wise. Therefore, as proved by the results of the study, TW and proficiency of students are positively correlated. Another finding suggested that there is no significant difference between the two genders concerning TW strategies.

**Keywords:** Test-wisness, Validity, Language testing, Multiple-choice items, Standardized tests

### 1. Introduction

Testing is an indispensable element of our daily activities. Whether we realize it or not we are involved in hypothesis testing about every cognitive and affective effort we make. The motive behind testing is to make decision about a course of action, depending upon the significance to be attached to them. Language testing being a challenging field of testing in general is no exception. There have been recent developments in the field of language testing and applied linguistics preoccupying the minds of language testing experts during last decades. Recent theoretical advances mainly concerned with three issues, language proficiency, the effect of test-formats, and the test-takers' characteristics. Also there have been methodological advances which dealt with issues in psychometric testing, statistical analysis, and test-takers strategies in completing test tasks (Bachman, 1991). The third methodological advance, test-wisness (hereafter TW), has been focus by experts in the field to investigate the process or strategies that test-takers employ on a variety of test formats. Miller, Fuqua and Fagley (1990, p.204) state that "individual differences in TW would tend to decrease the validity of the test scores because scores would reflect test-taking skills in addition to knowledge of the subject matter being tested", hence reducing the content validity of the test. In the same line, the present study intends to investigate how Iranian EFL students manifest TW strategies in classroom settings. In particular, this study seeks to identify the relative frequency of seven TW strategies among high and low proficient male and female Iranian EFL students.

### 2. Review of the Literature

Test-wisness has widely been defined as an individual's ability to improve his or her test score by recognizing and utilizing cues in the test items, format or testing situation (Houston, 2005). Test-wisness is largely independent of the subject matter for which the items are supposed to measure (Millman, Bishop & Ebel, 1965). In other words, TW is the

ability to use special strategies to select the correct response in multiple choice tests, without necessarily knowing the content or skill that is being measured. Specifically, multiple-choice tests are more susceptible to test-wiseness cues, so it was expected that there will be a stronger relationship between test-taking skills and multiple-choice test performance than with constructed response test performance (Edwards, 2003). This may be logically expected, since multiple-choice items contain numerous components (e.g. a stem and four alternatives) where TW cues may occur. Secondly, since multiple-choice items are usually the most difficult to construct, they may be readily susceptible to all types of shortcomings including TW.

TW is therefore a source of test invalidity. Examinees vary in their knowledge and use of TW principles and unless this is controlled some candidates will have an unfair advantage over others (Allan, 1992). Scruggs and Mastropieri (1992) also found out that all students are not equal when using test-taking skills effectively. Moreover, Miller, Fuqua and Fagley (1990) state "individual differences in TW would tend to decrease the validity of the test scores because scores would reflect test-taking skills in addition to knowledge of the subject matter being tested, reducing content validity" (p. 204). This implies the conception that language test scores cannot be interpreted simplistically as an indicator of the particular language ability we want to measure, because these scores are affected to some extent by the characteristics and context of the test tasks, the characteristics of the test-taker and the TW strategies. Therefore, these issues endanger both the validity and reliability of the tests which in turn influence the process of decision making as the paramount goal of measurement, whereas the "Orthodoxy in language testing is the maintenance of balance between reliability and validity" (Davies, 2003, p.365; see also Brown, 1996; Gronlund and Linn, 1990).

The next step in examining TW is to determine where and when it may appear. The "where" part of this question refers to what types of tests and test items are susceptible to TW effects. As one may suspect, teacher-made tests frequently exhibit TW cues. The reasons for this occurrence should be sought in teachers. First of all, compared to the professional test-constructor, most teachers are relatively naïve of the TW principles. Secondly, teachers usually do not have the need, desire, or knowledge to determine such factors as test reliability, validity, item difficulty, and item discrimination.

Although one would guess that standardized tests would be relatively immune to TW, research indicates that this is not the case. Diamond, Ayler, Fishman and Green (1976) believed that some of students do poorly on standardized tests, because they do not know how to take tests. One implication could be that other students have somehow learned to figure out the answer to multiple-choice items about which they have no knowledge, by using skills which are usually under the rubric "test-wiseness". Bracely (2001, as cited in Deerman et al. 2008, p.62) states that "Standardized tests are unfair not only in terms of non-accommodation for diverse learning styles, but they do not take into account subgroups, such as racial and ethnic minorities, students with disabilities, students with limited language proficiency, and students from low socioeconomic groups" (see also Shavelson, Webb & Burstein 1986). Moreover, a number of researchers have shown that training in various TW skills will improve test scores on subsequent standardized testing (Bergman, 1980; Oakland, 1972; Petty & Harrell, 1977; Shuller, 1979). This fact that performance on these tests was affected by "general" aspects of TW, indicates that TW is a pervasive factor affecting different tests in a variety of ways.

Returning to the original question of the manifestation of TW, the "when" aspect refers to the age of the test-wise individual. Surprisingly enough, TW spans the broadest age range possible. At one end of the spectrum is the preschool child, and at the other end adults. Many of the researchers (Bergman, 1980; Diamond, et al. 1976; Oakland, 1972; Shuller, 1979) postulated that TW could be taught to preschool and elementary subjects. Moving up the age continuum, university students and adults have exhibited TW skills in a number of studies (Bajtelsmit, 1977; Callenbach, 1973; Diamond & Evans, 1972; Morse, 1998). Therefore it may be concluded, that TW abilities are characteristics of all age groups.

Literature in the EFL/ ESL fields produced no studies dealing directly with TW, and a few which dealt with the concept indirectly (Allan, 1992; Vattanapath & Jaiprayoon, 1999). However, there have been a lot of studies in the wider domain of psychological education (Millman et al., 1965; Morse, 1998; Sarnacki, 1979 among others). Diamond and Evans (1972), Diamond et al. (1976), and Morse (1998) investigated the relative difficulty of several TW strategies and the results indicated somewhat similar increasing difficulty order of the strategies as follows: (a) grammatical cue, (b) longer option, (c) absurd alternative, (d) item giveaway, (d) specific determiner, (e) alliterative association. Then it was observed that skills such as grammatical cue, longer option, and absurd option, were statistically and significantly easier than specific determiner and alliterative association.

In a recent study, Allan (1992, p.102) reported an inventory of 33 TW principles under ten most generalizable strategies for multiple-choice tests. He incorporated four TW subscales in the instrument and trialed on several groups of ESL students. The findings indicated that students are somewhat test-wise and use different TW strategies and these strategies are not equally easy to employ. That is, the four strategies were of the following order of increasing difficulty: (a) similar option, (b) grammatical cue, (c) item giveaway, and (d) stem option.

Literature on TW suggests various studies done in the domain of TW correlates. For instance, research has demonstrated a positive relationship between TW and intelligence (Diamond & Evan, 1972), but not as strong as may

have been expected. In a similar study Dunn and Goldstein (1959) obtained correlations of zero between intelligence and TW abilities. As a result, it was concluded that the ability to pick up TW cues may be demonstrated at all levels of intelligence.

A rather different variable that would be expected to correlate with TW in a positive manner is verbal achievement. Recognition of most TW cues is dependent upon skills such as knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure (Sarnacki, 1979). A number of studies found a significant positive correlation between TW and verbal skills (Diamond & Evans, 1972; Rowley, 1974).

Another possible variable to correlate with TW is test anxiety. Logical considerations would suggest a negative correlation between them. A number of studies proved this predication of correlation (Allen, 1972; Beidel & Turner, 1988; Koons & Vasey, 2000; Petty & Harrell, 1977).

Another variable to mention is race. In one study conducted by Edwards (2003), there was support for the hypothesis stating that test-taking skills were partially related to test performance. According to obtained results, there were subgroup differences on test-taking skills, and test-taking skills partially mediated the relationship between race and test performance. However, the strength of mediation was not sufficient to reduce subgroup differences on the multiple-choice test to the levels of subgroup differences observed on the constructed response test. Also, Houston (2005), in her research, found out that there were no significant differences between whites and African Americans on the pre-test Learning measure and the pre-test Behavior measure. While overall, training had a positive impact on subjects' abilities to identify the test-wiseness cues on the Learning measure with subjects showing a significant improvement, subjects showed only marginal improvements on the Behavior measure. In addition, rather than diminishing group differences, test-wiseness training appeared to have no significant race by training effect on the Learning measure and appeared to exacerbate the differences between whites and African Americans on the Behavior measure.

Mohamed, Gregory and Austin (2006) conducted a study to compare the test-taking skills and abilities (test-wiseness) of Canadian senior-level pharmacy students with those of international pharmacy graduates. For this purpose a 20-item test-wiseness questionnaire was developed and administered to 102 participants. According to the results of their study, mean test-wiseness scores indicated significant differences in performance between senior level pharmacy students and international pharmacy graduates. Test-wiseness deficiencies of international pharmacy graduates were particularly severe in domains requiring discerning use of English language.

In general, there have been few studies investigating the role of gender, as another aspect of TW correlation, in language tests. Slakter, Koehler, and Hampton (1970), examining the relationship between TW, grade level, and gender, found that although gender was not related to TW abilities, grade level was. As the grade level increased so did individual's performance on TW scales. Along the same line, Lo and Slakter (1973) examined the relationship between risk taking on objective examinations, TW, gender, and prior experience on examinations among Chinese and American students. They evidenced no relationship between gender and risk taking, test experience and risk taking, and TW and gender. However Chinese students were consistently lower on mean TW score than their American counterparts. Mottalebzade (1993) found little difference between male and female performance on grammar and vocabulary. However, on reading comprehension and cloze, male students significantly outperformed female ones. Contrary to this finding, Farhady (1982) found no significant difference between male and female students on language tests except listening comprehension in which male participants had a better performance over the female ones.

### 3. Research Questions

The present study intends to investigate how Iranian EFL students manifest TW strategies in classroom settings. In particular, this study seeks to identify the relative frequency of seven TW strategies among high and low proficient male and female Iranian EFL students. These strategies will be incorporated in a test of TW, which is developed by the researchers and validated by three experts in the field of language testing and teaching. In order to come up with conclusive and comprehensive results and to achieve the research purposes, the following questions are put forward.

- 1) Do Iranian EFL students possess TW strategies? If so, which ones are most prevalent?
- 2) How far and in what ways is TW linked with language proficiency?
- 3) Is there any relationship between TW and gender?

### 4. Research Hypotheses

To have a wholesome speculation and to have systematic investigation of the research questions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H1:** There is a positive relationship between TW and proficiency of the Iranian EFL students.

**H2:** There is a positive relationship between TW and gender of the Iranian EFL students.

## 5. Methodology

A number of methods have been designed to elicit and determine the difficulty and frequency within which TW strategies are employed among different age groups and across different language skills and components. These methods were applied by researchers and testing experts via using a variety of instruments and procedures namely: (1) Test of test – taking skills, (2) Passage independence test, (3) Direct interviews, (4) Use of test formats, (5) Evaluating the results of test – taking skills training (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1992). Of all these methods and techniques employed to the assessment of TW strategies, test of test – taking skills has received a considerable attention for its economy and practicality. Justified on these characteristics, the researchers of the present study used this technique to investigate TW strategies among the participants.

### 5.1 Subjects

From among 138 (78 males and 60 females) participants, a total number of 80 undergraduate EFL students from Shahid Chamran University were chosen and divided on the basis of their proficiency scores into four cells of 20 individuals: High Proficient Male, Low Proficient Male, High Proficient Female, Low Proficient Female.

### 5.2 Instrument

In this research, the instrument used was a test of TW designed by the researchers of the study. It intended to measure seven TW strategies, each with 7 four – option multiple choice items. The seven strategies which were distributed among 50 items are as follows: 1) Stem option, 2) Grammatical cue, 3) Item giveaway, 4) Longer length option, 5) Option inclusion, 6) Similar option, 7) Specific determiner.

All of the 50 items were originally standardized in nature but after modification and for the present research purpose they were validated by three experts in the field of language teaching with an interest in language testing as well. They checked the items so that there was only one TW strategy per item, and that each item could be approached using only one strategy. Pilot items about which there was disagreement were either modified or dropped.

### 5.3 Procedures

Inspired by a pilot study which was done one year before the main experiment with 26 undergraduate EFL students from Shahid Chamran University, the researchers determined their procedure with some confidence. Ideas like total number of items, test administration time, number of strategies and participants were helpful in conducting the main experiment. In short, pilot study proved the feasibility of performing the main experiment.

Then, for the main study, a total number of 80 undergraduate EFL students from Shahid Chamran University majoring in English were chosen for the final experiment. They were screened and divided on the basis of their proficiency scores into four cells of 20 individuals. All of them were required to sit for the second exam after two weeks periods from the first experiment. They were gathered in the examination hall and supplied with a test of TW comprised of 50 items. All students were able to complete the test in 30-35 minutes. After the test completion some of the students voluntarily commented and verbalized many item flaws as well as strategies they used to answer. Their assertions were somewhat confirmed and evidenced in the data analysis.

After the test completion, answer sheets were collected and scored for the number of strategies the subjects employed correctly, without penalizing them for wrong answers. Then, the seven randomly distributed strategies were extracted from among 50 items by their pre – allocated item numbers. The scores were ranked on the number and frequency of strategies used by the participants. Moreover, high and low prevalent strategies in each group of the four cells of test-takers were roughly identified. To assess the exact number of TW strategies within and among the four groups as well as their correlations with proficiency and gender as independent variables, the data were yielded to a two way analysis of variance (ANOVA), t-test, and f-test. On the basis of these statistical procedures, meaningful differences were found among the four cells of participants which are discussed in the following part.

## 6. Data analysis and results

Mean scores and standard deviations for the performance on the test of TW for the four groups showed that high proficient male and female students had a better performance compared with their low proficient counterparts. Table 1 illustrates the results of one way ANOVA for the test of TW.

Insert Table 1 right about here

Although significant differences were observed among the four groups, they were not generalizable for all the TW strategies. That is, high proficient groups outperformed their low proficient counterparts only in three TW strategies (stem option, grammatical cue, and item giveaway) and these differences were not maintained for the other four strategies. More precisely, all groups performed almost equally in these four strategies. However, these results showed that TW and proficiency of students are positively correlated. In other words, more proficient students were more test-wise, too. Therefore, the first hypothesis is accepted at 0.05 level of probability. In brief, there is a significant

relationship ( $P > 0.05$ ) between TW and proficiency of the Iranian EFL students.

Insert Table 2 right about here

As the results indicate, there is no significant difference between the two genders (Table 2). Moreover, this lack of difference is observed through all the strategies. Therefore, gender is not a defining factor regarding the TW. Hence, hypothesis 2 is safely rejected at 0.05 level of probability. That is, there is no significant relationship ( $P < 0.05$ ) between TW and gender of the Iranian EFL students.

## 7. Discussion

One possible avenue of studying TW is to search for its possible correlates. This study was an attempt to investigate the correlations of TW and proficiency as well as TW and gender. The results indicated a positive correlation between TW and proficiency in which high proficient groups outperformed their low proficient counterparts in at least three TW strategies (grammatical cue, stem option, and item giveaway). The difference in implementing grammatical cue may be related to the amount and courses of grammar they have passed. Since high proficient groups were in higher levels of education, it seems logical to justify the obtained results by their greater exposure to grammar.

The difference in using stem option strategy may be sought in high cognitive maturation of the high proficient groups as a result of the greater exposure to test and test-taking experience. Because, contrary to the test-wise students, test-naïve ones looked for the answers only among the alternatives, while the former groups probably grasped the idea that understanding the stem-option relationship was the key and prerequisite to find the correct answer.

Another TW strategy in which proficient students had a better performance was item giveaway strategy. Test constructor may sometimes inadvertently give away the correct answer in another part of the test. This paves the way for an unfair situation in which test-wise students have advantage over other students because test-wise students have probably possessed a global and holistic view of test-taking routine. That is, they perceived the test items as a united and related entity, whereas test-naïve ones probably depended only on their knowledge of subject matter. Moreover, successful use of cues depends on previous test-taking experience.

However, these discrepancies among high and low proficient subjects were not prevailed through the other four strategies namely, longer option, option inclusion, similar option, and specific determiner. Implementing these strategies may necessitate high cognitive maturation on behalf of the students, which is appeared to be lacking in the test-taking power of the Iranian EFL students. These very findings are consistent with those obtained by Allan (1992), Diamond and Evans (1972), Diamond et al. (1976), and Morse (1998) in which the increasing mean P. value order of difficulty of the TW strategy was more or less alike as follows: stem option (5.64), item give away (5.35), grammatical cue (4.11), similar options (3.63), specific determiner (3.33), and longer length option (3.08). Thus, the present research along with other studies proves that TW strategies cannot be considered as a general trait and they are rather cue-specific. That is EFL students are equipped with some but not all TW strategies.

Another purpose of this study was to find if there is a relationship between TW and gender of the Iranian EFL students. Consistent with the results of previous studies, the present study found no significant relationship between TW and gender. At best, this equal performance of male and female students on the test of TW may possibly be attributed to their equal instructional and educational opportunities during their language learning career.

## 8. Conclusion

This study attempted to clarify the relationship between college students' proficiency and gender with their TW strategies. The results indicated a positive correlation between TW proficiency. That is, high proficient students outperformed their low proficient counterparts in TW. It shows that "Test-wise advice like "when in doubt, pick C", and "if you don't know, pick the longest answer" is still passed down from generation to generation of students" (Mohamed, Gregory and Austin, 2006). However, in order to make the evaluation system more valid and reliable, there should be ways to impede this sort of guessing. Therefore, the outcomes of the present research accompanied by those of aforementioned studies can be of value to various fields and professions dealing with evaluating process, teaching courses, curriculum development, teacher training courses, and test-construction processes. Appreciating the important role of TW in evaluation process, it is possible to get a more accurate picture of what we are measuring and move toward better testing tools, thereby an accurate decision making.

## 9. Limitations of the study

It goes without saying, however, that every study has its own particular limitations and this study is not an exception, too. The first limitation is concerned with the number of individuals who participated in the second phase of the experiment. To provide the obtained results with a high reliability, a wider range of test-taking population seems to be necessary. So, this requires another project with wider range of coverage and facilities. The second limitation of the study has to do with the fact that it is not known to what extent these results may apply to other test-formats or other test-taking circumstances such as standardized test, non-educational tests, etc. Therefore, other studies are required to

focus on the applicability of TW strategies in other test formats and specific tests such as matching, comprehension question, fill in the blanks, etc. However, it should be mentioned that these limitations did not have any influence on the obtained results. Rather, they are mentioned to prepare and propose other interested researchers to do future studies about the suggested issues.

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Table 1. one way ANOVA for the test of TW

Sources	D.F	SS	MS	F	F
				Ratio	Prob.
Between Groups	3	945.3	315.10	15.13	0.00
Within Groups	76	1582.7	20.82	-	-
Total	79	2528.0	-	-	-

D.F= degree of freedom

F=statistic value

SS=sum of squares

MS=mean square

Table 2. t-test results for TW and Sex variables

Sex	Number of cases	Mean	SD	SEM	F Ratio	P
1	40	30.22	5.92	0.93	0.55	0.45
2	40	27.77	5.15	0.81	-	-

SD= standard deviation

P= probability ratio

SEM= standard error of measurement

#### Appendix: Test of TW

This test contains vocabulary items and structures that you may never have seen before. However, it is possible to answer the questions successfully by using skills and intuition.

#### **Select the best answer out of a, b, c or d.**

1. Impressionist artists tried to ..... transitory visual impression of the real world.

\*a) capture

b) prevailed

c) intrinsically

d) achievement

Grammatical cue strategy

2. Composer Philip Glass created single-handedly a new musical genre with both classical and Popular appeal. He was .....

a) brilliant novelist

- b) a well-known painter  
 \*c) a splendid musician  
 d) a popular anthropologist Stem option strategy
3. He is fed up with those kinds of jobs, because they are .....  
 a) fascinating  
 b) attractive  
 c) amazing  
 \*d) boring Similar option strategy
4. A guyot is .....  
 a) a tall tree  
 b) a kind of boat  
 c) a beautiful wild flower  
 \*d) an under water mountain that does not reach the surface of the sea  
Longer option strategy
5. Pantean dessert is .....  
 a) never eaten for breakfast  
 \*b) usually eaten after a meal  
 c) always eaten at night  
 d) seldom eaten by children Specific determiner strategy
6. The author of that book implies that in 1960's Dr. King was .....to few people in Montgomery  
 a) primarily  
 b) gratitude  
 \*c) known  
 d) survive Grammatical cue strategy
7. In the 1860, Paul Tradson, a Danish surgeon, reported that damage to specific part of spinal cords was resulted to extreme difficulty in body's movement. This disorder is known as.....  
 a) Phineas disability  
 \*b) Tradson's disorder  
 c) Mark's disease  
 d) Morgan's aphasia Stem option strategy
8. Of all the language courses, French is .....  
 a) the least difficult to learn  
 b) the easiest to study  
 c) learned effortlessly  
 \*d) mentally challenging Similar option strategy
9. Tarestosia is .....  
 \*a) the study of universe as a whole and its nature  
 b) a sport  
 c) the art of writing  
 d) a kind of illness Longer option strategy
10. His speech was laconic. It means .....  
 a) he spoke very much  
 \*b) he expressed much in a few words  
 c) his speech was bitter

- d) he spoke critically Specific determiner strategy
11. "Sleep Learning" has become an..... topic of study in recent years.
- a) fascinating
- b) devastating
- \*c) intriguing
- d) pleasing Grammatical cue strategy
12. Granite crystals are large enough to be seen with .....
- \*a) naked eyes
- b) big telescopes
- c) precise spectacles
- d) geometrical devices Stem option strategy
13. Paul Tradson was a .....
- a) painter
- b) musician
- c) novelist
- \*d) surgeon Item giveaway strategy
14. Someone suffering from insomnia ..... has trouble sleeping during the day and night.
- a) seldom
- \*b) usually
- c) rarely
- d) infrequently Similar option strategy
15. "Procrastinate" means .....
- a) to play
- b) to make fun of somebody
- \*c) to put off doing something until a future time
- d) to be famous Longer option strategy
16. Dr. King met a few people in Montgomery in.....
- a) 1970's
- b) 1980's
- c) 1975
- \*d) 1960's Item giveaway strategy
17. Philip Glass created .....
- \*a) a new musical genre
- b) anthropological conventions
- c) attractive plays
- d) amazing works of painting Item giveaway Strategy
18. Football coach told the players to be abstemious. He meant the players should .....
- a) not eat anything offered to them
- \*b) be moderate in eating and drinking
- c) eat only after the game
- d) drink a lot of water Specific determiner strategy
19. There are a lot of men working there, but only one of them.....
- \*a) ranches cattle in the farm
- b) help me to cure our illness

- c) communicate with divers
- d) defend against invaders

Grammatical cue strategy

20. Frederica Von Stade has sung in opera houses throughout the U.S.A and abroad. He is a well-known .....

- a) artist
- b) actor
- \*c) singer
- d) householder

Stem option strategy

21. In Mackinnox time.....

- a) the day is longer than night
- b) the earth orbits very quickly
- c) the weather becomes very cold
- \*d) the day and night have equal length

Specific determiner strategy

22. Granite can be found .....

- a) naturally in the mountains
- \*b) in the form of the crystals
- c) in small and tiny sizes
- d) in every mine fields

Item giveaway strategy

23. He has got a mild sore throat, so he ..... coughs at night.

- \*a) often
- b) constantly
- c) always
- d) unceasingly

Similar option strategy

24. Grandma Moses, popular painter, spent her life in a ..... Little community.

- a) enormous
- b) unusual
- c) isolated
- \*d) tranquil

Grammatical cue strategy

25. Everyone agrees that she is similitude of her mother. It means she ..... her mother .

- a) works for
- b) is influenced by
- \*c) looks like
- d) fights

Stem option strategy

26. The Taylor returned the lawn mower to their neighbors .....

- a) immediately
- b) in time
- \*c) not promptly
- d) right away

Similar option strategy

27. Insomnia is a kind of .....

- a) flower
- b) disease
- \*c) sleep learning
- d) music

Item giveaway strategy

28. The idiom "to turn the table" means .....

- a) to be happy

- b) to get angry
- \*c) to change a situation to your own advantage
- d) to complain Longer option strategy
29. A person of mediocre abilities or attainments is the one .....
- \*a) who is not very good or very bad in his attainments
- b) who is always successful in his work
- c) whose abilities are amazing and fascinating
- d) who is never able to do a work Specific determiner strategy
30. "Labyrinth" is .....
- a) an authorized person
- b) a soft job
- c) a hasty action
- \* d) an arrangement of winding passages Longer option strategy
31. Benjamin Franklin was a/an .....
- a) scientist and philosopher
- b) inventor and craftsman
- c) humanitarian and essayist
- \*d) all of the above Option inclusion strategy
32. Gold, silver, copper and platinum are found in .....
- a) mines
- b) rocks
- \* c) nature
- d) mountains Option inclusion strategy
33. It is very discourteous to ..... during one's conversation.
- a) devastating
- \*b) intrude
- c) demolished
- d) frivolously Grammatical cue strategy
34. Symbiosis means .....
- a) absence of government control
- b) having an insatiable appetite
- \*c) close association of two organisms resulting in advantage to both
- d) style of hair arrangement Longer option strategy
35. Although tornadoes occur in many regions of the world, they are mostly prevalent in .....
- \*a) the United States
- b) California
- c) Texas
- d) Denver Option inclusion strategy
36. Scientists have established that man was present in the United States as early as .....
- \*a) 50,000
- b) 25,000
- c) 75,000
- d) 70,000 Option inclusion strategy
37. Many animals use odors for .....

- a) identification
- b) sexual attraction
- c) territorial marking

\*d) alarm and other purposes

Option inclusion strategy

38. The most spectacular recurring comet to be seen in historic times is ....., named after the English astronomer Edmund Halley, who discovered its periodicity in 1705.

- a) Evan's star
- \*b) Halley's comet
- c) The Galaxy
- d) Milky Way

Stem Option strategy

39. Grandma Moses was a popular .....

- a) politician
- b) writer
- c) musician
- \*d) painter

Item giveaway strategy

40. Liquid or gas pressure is exerted .....

- a) only in one direction
- b) in three directions
- \*c) equally in all directions
- d) in two direction

Option inclusion strategy

41. Pinalorous land is a kind of ..... area found in some countries.

- a) vast
- \*b) dried
- c) unlimited
- d) boundless

Similar option strategy

42. Estuary is a/an .....

- a) waterfall
- b) polluted area
- c) area of body
- \*d) mouth of a river where it mixes with the sea

Longer option strategy

43. Since Elizabeth Barret Browning's never approved of her marrying Robert Browning, the couple eloped to Italy where they lived and wrote. Mr. and Mrs. Browning are famous as..... nowadays.

- \*a) writers
- b) lecturers
- c) philosophers
- d) humanitarian

Stem option strategy

44. Because of the extreme pressure underwater, divers are ..... sluggish.

- a) never
- \*b) often
- c) seldom
- d) always

Specific determiner strategy

45. He received a ..... letter from his friend.

- a) impeccable
- b) obsolete

\*c) consolatory

d) uncanny

Grammatical cue strategy

46. The name Canada is derived from the Iroquoian Indian word KUNATA, meaning a .....

\*a) community

b) city

c) village

d) town

Option inclusion strategy

47. Edmund Halley was a/an .....

a) politician

b) musician

\*c) astronomer

d) anthropologist

Item giveaway strategy

48. Noxiom is considered to be a/an .....

a) idea

b) view

\*c) sign

d) conception

Similar option strategy

49. Perspicacious means .....

a) bright and happy

\*b) having penetrating insight to understand what is hidden or puzzling

c) calm and quiet

d) having generosity

Longer option strategy

50. Beta-carotene is a substance found in ..... from which the body produces A.

a) carrot

b) tomatoes

c) cabbage

\*d) vegetables

Option inclusion strategy



## Exploring Errors in Target Language\* Learning and Use: Practice Meets Theory

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### Abstract

The paper tries to answer the question--to what extent the English Language Teaching theory informs the ELT practice in a reflective case study. It argues that even if it is challenging considering what is beyond the theory in practical use of theory, yet if teacher educators in the field of ELT have a solid academic foundation, they will have the responsibility and capacity to challenge the theory, rethink it critically and even revise it.

**Keywords:** Rethink, ELT, Theory, Practice

### I. Introduction

Through this paper I intend to consider the following question: to what extent does the theory on errors inform approaches to analyses of errors\*\*, and how do the approaches impact the teacher's attitude towards errors, which is a vital factor in conducting error correction?

In order to answer this question, the paper begins with a case study, explicating the teacher's attitude towards errors occurring in the process of learners' target language (TL) learning and use, and illustrating the teacher's response and behaviours at the errors. Learners' reaction to the teacher is slightly mentioned. Secondly the paper reviews literature of theory as a concept in order to understand a skeletal analysis of how and why TL learners commit errors in the process of learning and use. In order to answer the target question, thirdly it is necessary to examine a number of commonly used terms such as interlanguage, habit, transfer, interference, Error Analysis and Contrastive Analysis, which play an important role in the paper.

### II. Case study: changing teachers

In the 1950s, my father was a student. In his memory, when his Russian teacher confronted the class-wide errors, he was always feeling frustrated and tortured. The teacher explained to my father that the 'public' errors were caused by the failure of his teaching, which led to students' 'ill-formed habits'. Consequently, he would do re-teaching as remediation. When he found that his re-teaching still did not reach a satisfying outcome finally, the students of his would be punished for committing the repeated errors. In the 1970s and 1980s, when I was a student from primary schooling to the completion of BA, what was unforgettable was that lots of my classmates' English assignment-books and English test papers were fully corrected by 'responsible' teachers, with red marks between lines and on margins.. To the teachers' disappointment, his students committed the same errors constantly. Those who made consistent errors would be criticized publicly or privately. I hated to learn English then, for psychologically speaking, more than once, my self-esteem was hurt by the red marks and the 'lessons' from the English teacher. From then on, I have not stopped throwing doubts on teachers' attitudes towards learners' errors and teachers' behaviors at learners until I became a teacher of English.

From the first day being a teacher, I have been in charge of more than two classes of English language teaching, each of which were made up of around 60 students. The school requirements read that students' compositions should be corrected not less than twice a week, as a result, I had to spend around 20 hours a week to challenge the heavy work by scanning students' written work carefully and 'correct' errors.

Totally differently from what Father's teacher and my teachers did, I used the technique called 'gentle-correction'. For instance, certain symbols were always used to indicate what kinds of errors which learners had made. The focus of marking in this way was to help learners to realize their errors consciously. When the learners got their written work back, they were asked to do self-correction basing on the indications in a given time. What I have done for years was that the common errors committed by my students were sorted and registered in my correcting process. The catalogued

errors was kept in a book named "Students' Error Portfolio", which was once shown on the fourth National Education Annual Conference held in Beijing in 1999. Usually most of the 'global' errors were re-dealt by the peer correction as reinforcement. The 'local' errors occurring individually were remedied by the learner himself/herself at the aid of me. "The errors committed in oral communication were always neglected unless they did affect the communication to a large extent" (Wu, 1990).

As a target language teacher, he/she is unavoidably faced with the task of analyzing learner's errors. No matter how much creative freedom he/she might like to give the learner, no matter how much he/she may dislike the focus traditionally placed on error, and no matter how much he/she may dread the act of correction, he/she eventually find himself/herself with pen in hand, especially diligently scanning the errors in learners' course work. As a result, analysing learners' errors becomes one of teachers' primary responsibilities. This responsibility is a heavy one, especially when a teacher considers that learners' errors range from sentence-level problems to topic development to essay structure and from oral to literacy (Nunan, 1996). In respect to this, errors are significantly worth studying.

### III. A review of theory and its implications for analyses of errors

The literature which I have referred to focuses on two major approaches to analysing errors committed by a target language learner: Contrastive Analysis (CA), Error Analysis (EA). "The theoretical base of CA lies in **Behaviourist Learning Theory**; while the EA is closely related with the emergence of **Interlanguage Theory**" (Ellis, 2005).

#### 1. Behaviourist learning theory accounts of errors

One of the most important advocates of behaviourism, B.F. Skinner (1957) developed S-R theory into a learning theory, which describes learning as the formation of associations between responses. A stimulus is that which is produced as a reaction to an individual organism. A response is the behaviour which is produced as a reaction to a stimulus.

The behaviourist learning theory illustrates the TL learning is a mechanical process of habit formation. In the 1950s and early 1960s, in the heyday of Behaviourist Psychology, it was thought that children learned their correct L1 habits by copying, even more exactly, the sentences that they heard adults use. Ellis (2005) reviewed, "a behaviour becomes a habit when a specific stimulus elicits an automatic response from the learner. It can be formed either through classical conditioning or through instrumental learning. Habits entail 'over-learning', which ensures that learning of new habits as a result of proactive inhibition. Thus, the challenge facing the L2 learner is to overcome the interference of L1 habits". Basing on the habit formation, Contrastive Analysis sought to identify the features of the L2 that differed from those of the L1 so that learners could be helped to form the new habits of the L2 by practicing them intensively. It suggested that the greater the difference between L1 and L2, the more difficult it would be the L1 to learn L2: the more the L1 would 'interfere' with the learning of the L2. Most errors that L2 learners were the result of differences between L1 and L2 structure (Martin, 1996).

Interference, the CA insists, is the result of unfamiliarity with the rules of a TL and psychological causes, such as inadequate learning (Swan, 2001). 'Transfer' can be positive or negative: linguistic features of the L1 that are similar to those of the TL will facilitate learning (positive transfer); those aspects of the L1 that are different to the TL grammatical and phonological system will hinder SLA and cause the learner to make numerous production errors (negative transfer). Thus differences between the L1 and the TL create learning difficulty which results in errors, while the similarities between them facilitate rapid and easy learning (Ellis, 1985 cited Corder). According to behaviourist learning theory, both types of transfer are the outcome of automatic and subconscious use of old habits in new learning situations (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982).

Rod Ellis (1985) assesses, "Errors, according to the theory, were the result of non-learning, rather than wrong learning. But in either case, there was almost total agreement that errors should be avoided. To this end, attempts were made to predict when they would occur. By comparing the L1 with the TL, differences could be identified and used to predict areas of potential errors. In this way classroom practice could be directed on the problem areas in order to help the learner overcome the negative effects of L1 transfer."

#### 2. Interlanguage (IL) theory accounts of errors

To my joy, Rod Ellis (2005, 54) views Error Analysis is based on emergence of IL theory. Before that, in my understanding, IL is not a theory, but it is known to be used to explain effectively the errors committed in SLA process. As a leading representative in the IL research field, Selinker coined IL in 1972. Ever since then, he has devoted himself to developing and discovering and exploring IL theory. Initially, Selinker (1972) tried to "find a way to explain the errors that some students make have nothing to do with their foreign language, for example, a Spanish speaker, an Arabic speaker and a Japanese speaker might all make the same mistake in English which was not related to their respective languages".

At its simplest level, Selinker (1992) describes IL as a "between language", a learner language which exhibits an increasing proximity to L2. The approximation of IL to L2 is a dynamic, often fluctuating process, influenced by

changes in knowledge about and how to use L2, as well as transfer of and hypotheses based on L1 structure applied to L2. The learner's current state of IL manifests itself in an ability to communicate in and understand the L2.

According to Selinker, L2 learners go through a process of making and testing hypotheses about the target language. They begin with knowledge about language in general, gained from their native language, and move toward the target language. Bit by bit, they readjust their mental model of the new language, improving their communicative competency in that language. Successful hypotheses become mental constructions that correspond to the rules of the new language. Unsuccessful hypotheses are revised or discarded. At any particular moment, the language student is located on an IL continuum between the native language and the target language. Brown (1993) viewed, "Truly successful students make the journey to a high level of competency in the target language, while less successful students become 'fossilized' somewhere along the IL continuum". "Central to the concept of IL is the concept of fossilization which generally refers to the cessation of learning.... Because of the difficulty in determining when learning has ceased, one frequently refers to stabilization of linguistic forms, rather than fossilization or cessation of learning. In SLA, one often notes that IL plateaus are far from the TL norms." (Gass & Selinker, 2001)

For around 35 years Selinker has viewed learner errors as evidence of positive efforts by the learner to learn a new language. This view of language learning allowed for the possibility of learners making deliberate attempts to control their own learning and, along with theories of cognitive processes in language learning. In 1992, he revised this notion of IL processes by including training and learning strategies as part of his IL hypothesis. Therefore, Selinker attests that transfer plays a role in IL construction as a strategy employed by learners (Brown, 2000).

Errors are indispensable to learners since the making of errors can be regarded as 'a device the learner uses in order to learn' (Selinker, 1992). A modern definition of language transfer is provided by Selinker (1992): "Language transfer is best thought of as a cover term for a whole class of behaviours, processes and constraints, each of which has to do with CLI [=Cross Linguistic Influence] i.e. the influence and use of prior linguistic knowledge, usually but not exclusively NL knowledge. This knowledge intersects with input from the TL and with universal properties of various sorts in a selective way to help build IL".

IL study results, as noted above, can better be understood to explain analyses of errors currently. The above views mainly from Selinker (1984, 1992) have validity captured the indefinite status of the learner's system between his/her native language and the TL. It also accounts for the fluid nature of the systems -- the rapidity of change. And it focuses on the rule-governed systematic nature of the learning process. The teacher can use IL approach pedagogically to formulate more reasonable expectations of TL performance from the student and should come to expect variability as the student continues to redevelop his/her language systems. So, the views reflect not only 'errors' but also the learners' possible IL systems (Selinker, 1992).

Selinker (1992) pointed out the two highly significant contributions that Corder made: "that the errors of a learner, whether adult or child, are not random, but are in fact systematic, and are not 'negative' or 'interfering' in any way with learning a TL but are, on the contrary, a necessary positive factor, indicative of testing hypotheses. In 1994, Gass & Selinker defined errors as "red flags" that provide evidence of the learner's knowledge of the second language.

#### **IV. A brief review of approaches to analyses of errors**

##### *1. Contrast Analysis (CA):*

Contrastive Analysis, an approach was generated from behaviourist learning theory. Through CA applied linguists sought to use the formal distinctions between the learners' first and second languages to predict errors.

The basic concept behind CA was that a structural 'picture' of any one language could be constructed which might then be used in direct comparison with the structural 'picture' of another language. Through a process of 'mapping' one system onto another, similarities and differences could be identified. Identifying the differences would lead to a better understanding of the potential problems that a learner of the particular L2 would face (Corder, 1983).

Primary tenets of CA are: 1. Prime cause of difficulty and error in foreign language learning is interference coming from the learner's native language. 2. Difficulties are chiefly due to differences between the two languages. 3. The greater the differences, the more acute the learning difficulties will be. 4. The results of a comparison between the two languages are needed to predict the difficulties and errors which will occur in learning the target language. 5. What needs to be taught is discovered by comparing the languages and subtracting what is common to them. (Corder, 1981)

Purists of CA advocate strongly: "development of teaching methods based on a comparison of phonological, grammatical, and syntactical features of the native language and target language." (Corder, 1981) A "weaker" version emphasizes analyses of errors after they occur. Some researchers believe the latter method to be the more valid of the two, and it is certainly a more realistic pedagogical approach (Ellis, 1994).

Two versions of CA can help the teacher, although the teacher should not expect him or herself to practice the "strong" version. The teacher ought to be aware of some basic language differences, and anticipate and recognize errors that

frequently result from L1 interference or, at least, consider L1 interference as a possibility (Hughes, R., & Heah, C. 1993). For example, Chinese students will have great difficulty with the indefinite and definite articles since they are not used in Chinese. And shared the reason, the English verb-tense errors made by Chinese learners cover the large area in the English learning process. The Chinese teacher of English should consciously be aware of the differences through the patient comparative or contrastive analysis between Chinese and English. Then the teaching well-prepared for differences will lead to providing an efficient instruction, especially in the input process.

As a result of the behaviourist learning theory illustrated in the above, it is inadequate for CA to account for why different people learn the same L2 so differently.

## 2. Error Analysis (EA):

EA emphasizing “the significance of errors in learners’ IL system” (Brown 1994) may be carried out directly for pedagogic purposes.

Carl James (1998) viewed, “EA developed out of the belief that errors indicate the learner's stage of language learning and acquisition. The learner is seen as an active participant in the development of hypotheses regarding the rules of the target language just as is a young child learning the first language. Errors are considered to be evidence of the learner's strategy as he or she builds competence in the target language. These errors are defined as global, which inhibit understanding, and local, which do not interfere with communication.”

In the book “Error and Interlanguage” written by Pit Corder, the “Father” of Error Analysis (1981), he stated that various classifications of these error systems have been developed by error analysis researchers, three of which can be helpful for the teacher and are as follows. 1. Pre-systematic -- errors occur before the language learner has realized any system for classifying items being learned; the learner can neither correct nor explain this type of error. 2. Systematic -- errors occur after the learner has noticed a system and error consistently occurs; learner can explain but not correct the error. 3. Post-systematic -- errors occur when learner is consistent in his or her recognition of systems; can explain and correct the error. The second classification also relies on three major groups: (1) interference errors; (2) intralingual errors; or (3) development errors. Interference errors are caused by the influence of the native language, in presumably those areas where the languages differ markedly. Intralingual errors originate with the structure of TL itself. The complexity of the language encourages over-generalization, incomplete application of rules, and failure to learn conditions for rule application. Development errors reflect the student's attempt to make hypotheses about the language -- often independently from the native language. Again according to Corder, the following steps are distinguished in conducting an EA: “collection of a sample of learner language; Identification of errors; description of errors; explanation of errors; and error evaluation” (Ellis cited in 2005).

From my current reading, I have seen that a number of examples have been cited regarding to the classification of errors. So far the classification mentioned above by Corder helps me gain a better understanding of the processes of the TL which is learned as an **interlanguage**.

## 3. From the analyses of errors to the practice of error correction

From the case study in the beginning of the paper, we know that in the traditional TL language learning and teaching, because the focus of classroom instruction is laid on accuracy, errors are frequently corrected because the teacher thinks the errors as a thorn in his/her flesh. Yet with the understanding of IL theory, the role of error correction has changed. Errors are considered natural products in language learning and in fact reflect the modes of learners' developing IL system. Thus, errors are no longer the thorns in the teachers' flesh that need immediate picking.

It is significant that the TL teachers form the concepts that not all errors need to be corrected right after they are made. Some errors are infrequent and may be ‘slips’, which do not bar the communication either in an oral form or in a written form. These errors mostly can not be corrected. According to IL continuum, in order to help learners make progress, for persistent errors, especially those shared by most students, teachers should correct them consistently in varieties of ways. Another consideration concerning about learners' individual reactions towards error correction is that some students may emotionally over-react to this kind of face-threatening act.

Positive affective comments should be offered first to encourage learners and to decrease the tension caused by error correction. In my correcting practice, I managed to mainly list out learners’ ‘sparking points’ (merits), and after ‘but’ some of the suggestions will be given to them. To avoid potential risk of discouraging students, students' self-correction with teachers' or peer's help is encouraged. By doing so, students are provided with more opportunities to complete his or her task and thus to obtain a sense of achievement (Swain, 2001). From many years of my teaching practice, this kind of activity can create a friendlier atmosphere than a teacher’s correction. However, this does not suggest that teachers’ correction would always hurt students' feelings and should always be avoiding to use. And the peer’s correction sometimes can not avoid copying each other’s errors. Teacher correction can be beneficial when errors are repeatedly made by most students. In fact, it can be applied without necessarily making students feel embarrassed or threatened.

In a word, both approaches provide the teacher with workable methods for reasonably determining the source of error. But the EA works more effective.

## V. Discussion

From the case study, I find a gradual shift in error correction practice, from the immediate correction of every error affected by behaviourist learning theory to a more 'tolerant' approach related with IL theory. "Yet error correction remains one of the most contentious and misunderstood issues in the TL language teaching profession" (Wu, 1990).

"The analyses of errors are undoubtedly valuable teaching tools, and the teacher should handle them cautiously and with the awareness that all have their faults, on which researchers have also validly criticized Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis"(Tarone, 1983).

"Not correcting errors sounds scandalous even irresponsible to some language educators and many students, so teachers may think they are doing the right thing by not correcting immediately and frequently" (Wu, 1990). But from the learners' aspect, they may assume those teachers do not know English well enough to give appropriate feedback. Thus how can they acquire the TL or L2 effectively or in a faster pace?

From my experience, too much error correction could frustrate students and even overwhelm students' motivation and interest of learning the TL language. Therefore, it is really necessary for teachers to consider the practical situation of learners and teachers' own linguistic background, and then conduct the correction in 'good timing' using 'appropriate' correction strategies.

## VI. Conclusion

The analyses of errors are coherently related with teachers' attitudes towards errors, and the attitudes directly result in the teacher's behaviours in the process of error correction. The analyses of errors are generated from two different theories: CA is based on Behaviorist Learning Theory and EA is on Interlanguage Theory. If the analyses are regarded as practice, the practice meets the theory. From the operation level, the analyses work as a bridge between the theory and the error correction practice, which 'constitute a unified whole' (Kumaravabivelu, 2003). On the other hand, one the road from theory to practice, practice unbrokenly informs theory by the way of reflection.

The two approaches to the analyses of errors are undoubtedly valuable in error correction field. Not only should teacher educators work as practitioners to use them well and but also we should understand that the two approaches has just touched the TL learners' sentence-level errors, but not all kinds of errors occurring frequently like in the development and structuring of writings. "Technical errors can occur in both comprehension and in production, but the comprehension errors are not detected as well in either of the analyses of errors." (Ellis, 2005)

My personal understanding is that in practical use of theory, it is challenging considering what is beyond the theory. From the rational explanation, some well-accepted theories, like interlanguage theory, which is thought to be the best theory to explain the errors at present, should be persistently upgraded. Again from the practice level, teacher educators are more expedient to do teaching and learning research. My suggestion is that as the premise we teacher educators should study about theories, fully understand them, then we can select and apply and conduct them in multi-dimensional ways. If we, teacher educators, have a solid academic foundation, I think then we will have the responsibility and capacity to challenge the theory, rethink it critically and even revise it.

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### Notes

\*Target Language (TL): the language that the learner is attempting to learn, for instance, the foreign language (FL) or the second language (SL). It comprises the native speaker's grammar. (Rod Ellis, 1985).

\*\*analyses of errors: Because error analysis is an academic term in the SLA field, which has its specific definition, I use the term 'analyses of error' in my paper, which accounts of the two major approaches for analyzing the errors occurring in the TL learning and use.



## Analogous Study of the Linguistic Knowledge between Monolingual and Bilingual Students in the Minority Region of Northwestern China

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### Abstract

Minority students' English learning is a special and an indispensable component of English education system in China. This article studies students' linguistic knowledge that live in Northwestern China – Gan Nan Autonomy State of Gan Su Province with majority population of Tibetan, mixed with Chinese and some Muslim. An analogous analysis is conducted between **L2** students (Chinese students who learn English as a second Language) and **L3** students (Tibetan Students whose first language is Tibetan, second language is Chinese, and third Language is English) in English Linguistic Knowledge. The linguistic knowledge is constituted of vocabulary, grammar and reading skill. (Raykov, T., & Marcoulides, G.A., 2006) The paper concludes the remarkable difference exists between the Tibetan Students and Chinese students in Linguistic Knowledge, especially on vocabulary and grammar. The difference on reading skill is apparent, but not significant. The reasons that caused these distinctive or non-dramatic differences are explored and further discussed respectively.

**Keywords:** Monolingual, Bilingual, L3/L2, Linguistic knowledge

### 1. Introduction

Almost everywhere in the world, school education at elementary and secondary levels is provided in the official language of the country or region. For the large number of students, it is their native or first language, the language they acquired at home before they go to school. (Amos van Gelderen, 2003) It is true for Chinese students whose native language is Chinese and therefore are called Monolinguals. For a considerable number of students, however, the language of schooling is not their first language. Tibetan students who live in the study area are fall into this category and therefore are called Bilinguals. Most of the Tibetan students can speak Tibetan fluently before they acquired Chinese in school.

Some studies suggest that in learning foreign language, monolingual students (refer to **L2** students whose only language is Chinese before they learn English) and bilingual students (refer to **L3** students who master both Tibetan and Chinese before they learn English) possibly experience the same difficulties, being a second (L2) or a third (L3) language, is relatively new to both groups. By foreign language we mean a "non-indigenous" language, which is only taught at school. (Sanders and Meijers, 1995) English is the most commonly taught foreign language in Chinese secondary schools.

Some studies also suggest that bilingual students have an advantage in learning a new (foreign) language in comparison to monolinguals (Thomas, 1988; Valencia & Cenoz, 1993). Several explanations have been suggested for this advantage of L3 in contrast to L2 learning. According to Thomas (1988), bilinguals learning a third language have more sensitivity to language as a system, which helps them to perform better in formal language learning activities than monolinguals learning a new language for the first time (cf. Sikogukira, 1993). Corder (1979) suggests that knowing languages other than the L1 has a facilitating effect on learning a new language, because there are more opportunities for making comparison with the new language. Consequently, the L3 learners can generate a larger number of hypotheses about the new language's structure and characteristic and subsequently test them in the language learning process.

Instead of approaching the question from the point of view of advantages, it is possible to look for differences in the underlying structure. This article compares two groups of students' Linguistic knowledge to verify whether they both

experience the same level of difficulty in learning English. On the other hand, the article surveys all the L3 students to prove whether bilinguals do have more sensibility than monolinguals in English learning process as stated above.

To our knowledge, no similar comparative study has been done between minority students and Chinese students in the Northwestern part of China. For this part, the study is predominantly exploratory.

## **2. Methodology**

### *2.1 Participants*

The study is conducted with the advantage that I am the English teacher in He Zuo Minorities Teachers' College, the college trains English teacher for the Gan Nan Autonomy State and areas beyond. I have access to both monolingual and bilingual students in school year 2007-2008. A sample of 100 L2 students and 100 L3 Students from different grades were randomly invited for the survey. Students who identified themselves as L3 students are in the divisions called "Tibetan English Major", who are able to speak and write Tibetan fluently, can also speak and write Chinese fluently outside of their home environment. The ones identified themselves as L2 students are in the division called "Chinese English Major". Both groups' EFL (English as Foreign Language) education was focused on vocabulary, grammar, and reading skill.

### *2.2 Instruments*

Two questionnaires were designed for the study. Questionnaire I intended to test students' linguistic knowledge objectively. The difficulty level of questionnaire was adjusted to the expected level of students considering the average English education level in minority regions is relatively lower than that of other regions. Questionnaire II provided background of two groups and evidence of students' reading skill capability, which ultimately lead to deeper discussion the study involved. The following paragraphs briefly describe the format of each test and how the survey conveys the tasks we are trying to accomplish.

Linguistic knowledge testing is embodied in the examination of their vocabulary, grammar knowledge and reading skill. The vocabulary test is conducted with the questionnaire that consists of 50 words, including noun, verb, adjectives, articles and adverb. Some words are existing words, others are pseudo words. Students were asked to mark down the valid English words for Vocabulary testing purpose. The grammar test asked students to specify the part of speech for each word using the same 50 words instrument. The reading skill was measured by a questionnaire consisting of 10 statements which students were asked to indicate agreement or disagreement on each of them. This is based on "The reading skill is the ability to use strategies that students developed in their first language to regulate the reading process in second or third language. For example, the reading of a text in order to find a piece of information requires a different strategy from reading for memorization of as many details as possible. The way readers adapt their reading strategies to their reading goals reflects their reading skill". (cf. Baker & Brown, 1984; Flavell, 1979; Schoonen, Hulstijn, & Bossers, 1998)

Questionnaire II was provided in both Chinese and English to ensure other possible variables that might affect the survey results are eliminated. (See attachment I and II).

### *2.3 Procedure*

Tests were conducted during school hours in 5 difference classes, 3 of them consisted of L2 students, and the other 2 consisted of L3 students. The data were collected, accumulated, averaged based on different groups, and then further analyzed using Statistics Software to create linear distribution charts and histogram charts. Then, a trend of data distribution was also generated to reflect two groups of students' performance on linguistic knowledge. Finally the reasons that result in the corresponding distribution graphics were explored.

### *2.4 Scoring*

The three components of Linguistic knowledge were scored by percentage to measure the two groups' performance. For each group, the highest and the lowest score were omitted as outliers. The average value of each component was then compared.

## **3. Data Collection and Analysis on Vocabulary and Grammar**

### *3.1 Data Collection*

The following 2 sets of words were selected to test L2 and L3 students' vocabulary and grammar knowledge. (please also see section 1 of Attachment I)

Sam, Sad, Sag, Sax, Saw, Sat, Sap, Settle, Sandal, Sahara, Seattle, Scandal, Sable, Salutee, Sapour, Sarah, Sattyer, Seattle, Sorry, So, Sister, Sit, Stupid, Sperm, Spam, Student, Settle.

August, Aouroust, Anger, Australian, Arm, Anticipate, Anthrax, Autonomy, Automobile, Aunt, Ant, Anxious, About, Annous, Akans, Adrin, Afing, Alone, Adues, Aristics, Artist, Aborn, Ador

The questionnaires were collected and then classified to L2 group and L3 group correspondingly. The score was given to each questionnaire based on the percentage of questions that were answered correctly. Students get one point if they can recognize an existing word correctly, vice versa, they get one point if they can recognize a pseudo word. The total score for word recognition is 50. If a student can distinguish all the words correctly, he gets 50 points on vocabulary part. On grammar test, if students can indicate the right part of speech for a word, he gets one point. If he can indicate all 50 words correctly on their part of speech, he gets 50 points. With total 100 points, if a student earned 30 points on word recognition and 40 points on grammar, his scored is 70 in total.

### 3.2 Data Processing

The scores were accumulated, categorized into 5 levels: 90-100, 80-90, 70-80, 60-70, and less or equal to 60. A frequency polygon and a histogram were generated out of those scores to compare the two groups of students' performance. See Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 Here

The frequency polygon diagram (Figure 1) indicates the highest score among L2 Students is 93, and the lowest score is 45. Whereas, the highest score among L3 Students is 90, and the lowest score is 28.

Another histogram chart is generated to measure the frequency distribution of students' score. See figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 Here.

The blue histogram bar chart shows that the majority of L2 students (48%) scored between 70-80, whereas, the red histogram tells the story of the majority of L3 students (49.5%) scored lower than 60. There are about 10% of L2 students scored below 60. Interestingly the number of students who scored between 60-70 from both groups is almost the same.

Correspondingly, the polyline represents the trend of 2 groups of students score distribution. The blue line shows L2 students' score is a near normal distribution with bell shaped diagram plotted. In another word, the mean, media, and mode value of the scores are almost equal and locate at the peak of the arc. As we calculated those values for L2 students, we found they are consistent with the diagram as following: the mean score  $\mu$  (Average of all score) is 70.42, the median score (half of students scored over the median and half of the students scored below the median) is 71, and mode (midpoint of the class containing the largest number of class frequencies) is 75.

We also calculated the standard deviation ( $\sigma$ ) for L2 students, which is the value to measure the variability of data in a sample. The standard deviation of the L2 students is 10. That means around 68 percent of the L2 students' score are located within 60-80 ranges, which is between  $\mu-\sigma$  and  $\mu+\sigma$ . 95 percent of L2 students' score are within 50-90 ranges, which is between  $\mu-2\sigma$  and  $\mu+2\sigma$ .

$$f(x) = \frac{e^{-(x-\mu)^2} / (2\pi^2)}{\sigma\sqrt{2\pi}}$$

Where  $\mu$  is the Mean value of the sample, and  $\sigma$  is the standard deviation.

The red line represents L3 students' score. It is very different than the blue line in that it is not bell shaped; instead it depicts a trend that with increasing number of students get lower score in general. We also calculated the Mean, Medium and Mode value for L3 students score, they are: the mean  $\mu$  score of L2 students  $\mu$  is 56.12, the median score (half of students scored over the median and half of the students scored below the median) is 60, and mode (midpoint of the class containing the largest number of class frequencies) is 45. Those numbers are very different comparing to L2 students' corresponding value. The standard deviation for L3 students is 16. The trend is in a skewed distribution pattern, which indicates that either the students' sample was not broad or large enough or there are special reasons causing the skewness.

Since all 100 of L2 and 100 of L3 students were randomly selected for participation, and we later verified using the questionnaire 2 (see attachment II) that all of the L3 students are Tibetan, they came from different area of the state. It eliminates the possibility that sample data are not broad or large enough. There must be special reasons caused this skewed distribution of L3 Students' performance on linguistic knowledge. We will discuss it in the next section.

Both the trend line and statistic measurement variables reveal the fact that there are big differences exist between L2 and L3 students' linguistic knowledge.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

By digging deep of reasons that L3 student's linguistic knowledge is far behind L2 students, combining my 10 years of working experience and more than 30 years of life experience in the area, I identified the following facts that count for this result.

**First, age-linguistic factor:** As we all know that the earlier people expose to a foreign language, the easier they master the language and better linguistic skill they developed of that language. L3 students were exposed to English in their high school years, and had received an average of 4.5 years of education in EFL (English as Foreign Language); Whereas, L2 students started learning English in their junior high school years, and had an average of 7.5 years of education in EFL. In another word, L2 students started English learning during their puberty. This is the time that the human brain takes a “set” in the “language center”, having the best capability of memorizing and processing the language details, the flexibility and effectiveness of the language functionality loose after then. (Jorge Chavez, 2002). Three years of difference in learning a foreign language stage made a huge difference. Philologists tell us that if you learn three languages before puberty, your language centers will remain adaptive and flexible. Anyone who has learned three languages as a child will be able to learn a fourth or fifth language later in life, and learn to speak it without an accent. The result of the data analysis indicates that L2 students established solid linguistic skills of vocabulary and grammar, while L3 students are still in the process of accumulating and acquiring that knowledge.

**Second, psycholinguistic factor:** due to the culture difference, L3 students have some learning barriers of English. Most of the L3 students grew up in small villages, where the environment and culture are relatively obdurate. Most of them never went outside their villages until they went to high school, and 70% of the L3 students never been to the big cities like capital of the province- Lan Zhou. It took them quite awhile to get used to the college life, not even mention they are overwhelmed and challenged by modernism of the city in many ways from culture, mentality, and life. L3 students are psychologically self-contradictory, complicated, and therefore tend to be shy, that is manifested by not speaking out. Most of them avoid to read English loudly, some of them are afraid of answering questions in the class especially when they do not know how to pronounce. In the traditional Tibetan culture people even believe that girls are not suppose to speak out in front of public. We found that L3 female student’s score were especially low when we counted only female L3 students’ score.

**Third, sociolinguistic factor:** most of L3 students’ worldview and ethical consciousness have established before they learned English. In other words, their nationalism and the environment where they grow up have determined their way of thinking and learning. The social relationship among Tibetan is simpler than Chinese and Western Country in many ways. As they grow up, their mother language and the way of thinking are already challenged and modified, sometimes conflicted by Chinese. They started learning English as the their third language after all above factors occurred, the conflicts and distraction from both their mother language and second language stressed learning barrier in the process of acquiring English. After all, Tibetan, Chinese, and English are so difference in many ways such as pronunciation, grammar, structure, implementation and especially culture. For instance of name, Tibetans have no last name, only first name, they can only choose their name from existing names. They are not supposed to create new names. That leaves a very high chance of duplicated names among Tibetans. Chinese have both Last and first name. Last name is usually from family, first name can be created and combined with any word usually up to 3 words, and pronounce the name as Last name first and then first name. In western culture, people have first name, **middle names** (placed between the first and last), and last name. First and Middle name are both given name by parents, usually second given name (middle name) mean different thing to different people, some people may choose a middle name by using the literal meaning of the name, while others may choose their middle name based on a more sentimental meaning. In the U.S, the middle initial is sometimes used in formal documentation or official records, such as George W. Bush. They pronounce first name, and last name in the daily use, but omit the middle name.

#### 4. Data Collection and Analysis on reading skill

##### 4.1 Data Collection

Second part of questionnaire I was designed to examine students’ reading skill, which is the ability to use their reading strategies to regulate the reading process.

Students were asked to indicate the sentences that they think reasonable and agree with. (Please also see section 2 of Attachment I)

1. The computer is made of iron and plastics.
2. Car has 8 wheels.
3. Light can reveal the darkness
4. Sun and Moon are moving most of the time but stops sometimes.
5. She wants to go to bed because she is tired.
6. No one know his name except his teacher
7. School opens at 3 am in the morning
8. Students love to play volleyball because it is not nice.

9. Kids argue to each other because they want their parents to fight
10. I hope I get a good score in school so I can drop school.

The questionnaires were collected and then classified to L2 and L3 group respectively. Students get 10 points on each sentence that they did right, and total score is 100.

#### 4.2 Data Processing

The data processing procedure is the same as the one for Vocabulary and Grammar: scores were accumulated, categorized into 5 levels: 90-100, 80-90, 70-80, 60-70, and less or equal to 60. A histogram was then created to show the reading skill of two groups of students. See Figure 3.

Insert Figure 3 Here

79% of L2 students scored over 60, whereas, 64% of L3 students scored over 60. The majority of L2 students scored in 60-70 ranges, and majority of L3 students scored in the same range. It is very interesting that we found no significant difference existed between L2 and L3 students in reading skill even though L3 students are still behind of L2 in general. L3 students did better in reading test than on Vocabulary and Grammar.

#### 4.3 Data Analysis

Recently, the role of meta-cognitive awareness in L3 reading has been studied (Bruno, 2001). According to this study, L3 readers may use their awareness of reading strategies and lexical awareness developed in L1 and L2 to compensate for their limited proficiency in the foreign language. Hacquebord (1989). Statements were designed to test the strategies student took to finish their reading goal, including the ability to pick up the key words while reading, and ability to use common sense to make a logic judgment. We found as long as both L2 and L3 students capture the key word and understand the meaning of the sentences, they can make logic and precise judgment of the statements. However, 20% of L2 students 36% of L3 students are still scored below 60 largely because the foundation of vocabulary and grammar was not established solid yet. Foreign language reading skill is very much dependent on the reading skill that students developed in their first language. Good first-language readers will read well in the foreign language once they have passed a *threshold* of foreign language ability. (O.c.: 4). It seem most of L2 and L3 students developed good reading skills on their first language, as soon as they pass the threshold on linguistic ability, they should be able to pass that strategy on English reading.

The questionnaire II was designed to supplement and verify the reading skill theory stated above (Please see attachment II). It provided the background of each student, as well as their findings of the comparability between Tibetan and English. The result of survey shows that 95% of the L3 students found there are some similarities between English and Tibetan. They have also compared the English with Tibetan during their English learning process. 60% of students were able to give some examples of the similarities between Tibetan and English such as grammar and tense.

To sum up the data collection and analysis, the analogous analysis of relationship between L2 and L3 students in linguistic knowledge shows there are significant differences between two groups on Vocabulary and Grammars, however there is no substantial difference on reading skill between 2 groups.

### 5. Findings and Conclusions

We used the componential model to determine the contribution of constituent skills to L2 and L3 students in English Linguistic knowledge. The questionnaires are designed specifically for those three skills. The data were then collected and analyzed; the data distribution and correlation of two groups on each skill were then mapped and further discussed.

The result of the study indicates that the componential model of English Linguistic Knowledge is valid for both L2 and L3 students. The significant differences exist between L2 and L3 students on vocabulary and grammar; however, it is minor in reading skill. We discussed there are English learning barriers among L3 students that caused by social, psychological and age factors, though we found L3 students are intelligent in making logic judgment of the sentence in their reading test. L2 student has advantage over the L3 students in many ways, they started learning English earlier, they were raised in an environment that are relatively more open to the outside world, they have less conflicts and confusion in their English learning course. However, L3 students are advanced in the area that they prone to be more sensitive to the English as they have more opportunity to make comparisons, and in turn may generate a larger number of hypotheses about the English structure and characteristics and subsequently test them in the English learning process. It is perfectly proved by their reading skill and answers of the questionnaire II.

China is on fast track in developing economy, and with new appearance interacting with the rest of the world. The necessity and pressure of master English is crucial to both L2 and L3 students as it is the key to communicate with the western world. In the northwestern minority region, English learning seems extremely important, as those students are the motivators who will drive the region to mingle with rest of country and even interact with rest of the world. They are the generations to take China to the world stage and play an important role in the world political and economic arena. L3 students are expected to adjust themselves to the Chinese community in the overall culture mingle course, with more open

minded attitude and prepare themselves for challenges. They can and will make huge contribution to the Region's economical, political, educational and social development, and they will be the elite among the Tibetans to develop the region to be a better place to live on the earth.

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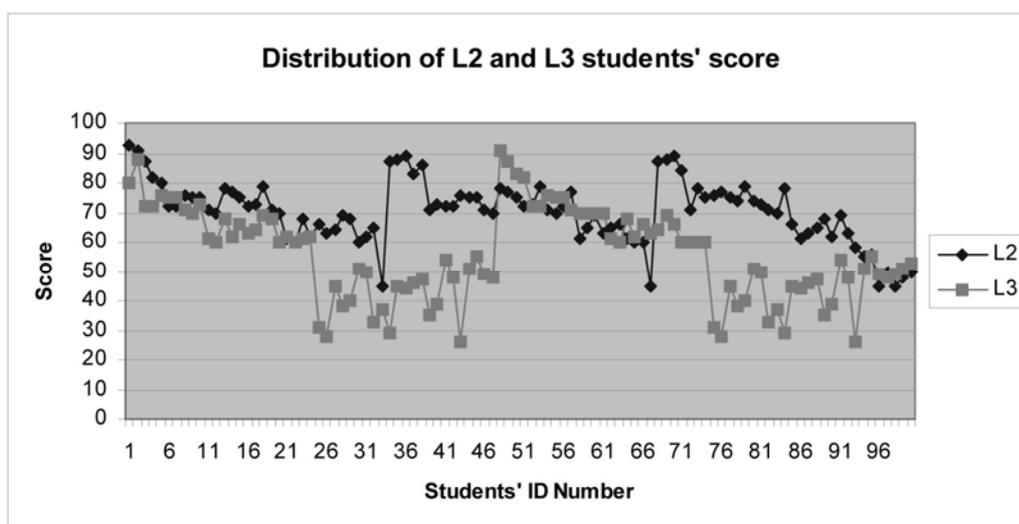


Figure 1.

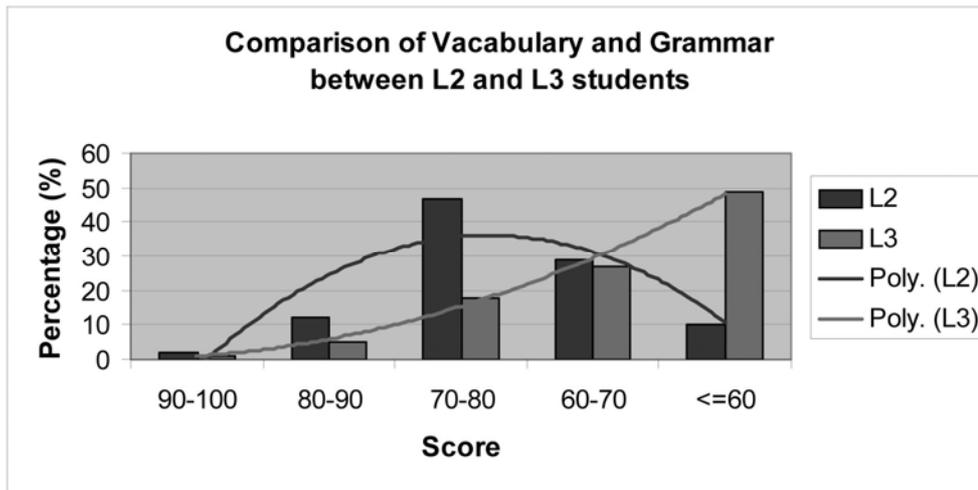


Figure 2.

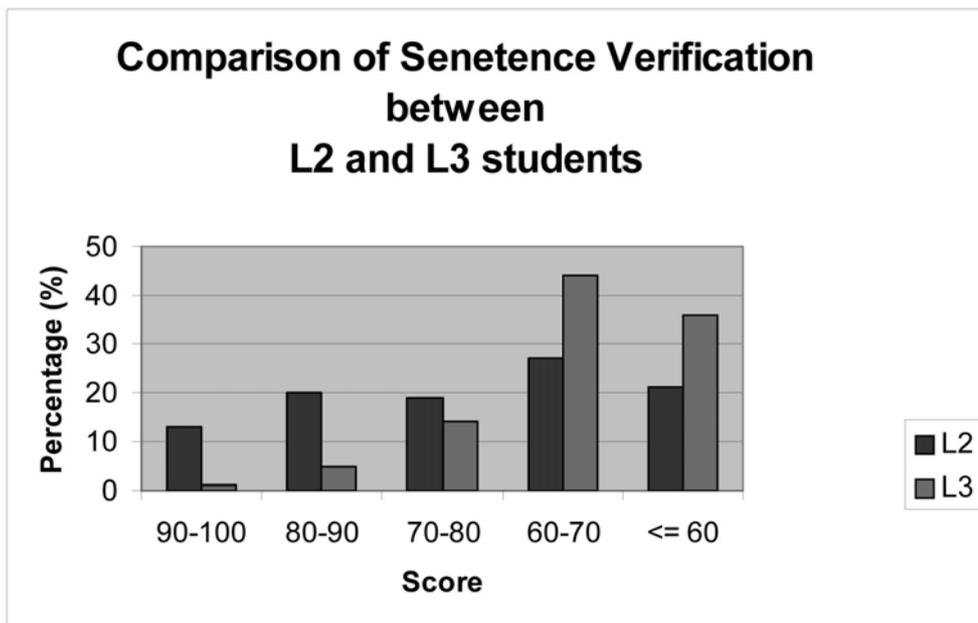


Figure 3.