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China's English Language Environment

Jeffrey Gil
School of Humanities, Flinders University
GPO Box 2100, Adelaide, South Australia, Australia, 5001
Tel: 61-8-8201-2436 E-mail: Jeffrey.Gil@flinders.edu.au

Abstract

Chinese students and teachers often say that the major challenge they face in acquiring English is that "China does not have a good English language environment" (*zhong guo de ying yu huan jing bu tai hao*) by which they mean there are insufficient opportunities to use English in real life situations and a lack of exposure to authentic English language material. Based on a review of the use of English in China and the author's own experiences living and teaching there, this paper will show that China's English language environment is actually much richer than is commonly believed. It argues that the two main issues which need to be addressed are raising awareness of the amount and type of English language material and opportunities to use the language available and developing ways for students and teachers to use such material and opportunities, both in and outside of the classroom.

Keywords: China, English language environment, Authentic materials, Teaching and learning English

1. Introduction

As China continues to modernise and open to the world, demand for English language skills has intensified and enthusiasm for learning English is also at an all time high. As Jiang (2003) says, "governments are encouraging their citizens to learn English, parents are persuading, even forcing, their children to speak it and college students are doing English at the expense of their majors" (p. 6).

Although the importance of English is widely acknowledged, Chinese students and teachers frequently comment that the major challenge they face in acquiring the language is that "China does not have a good English language environment" (*zhong guo de ying yu huan jing bu tai hao*) by which they mean there are insufficient opportunities to use English in real life situations and a lack of exposure to authentic English language material. Although at first this appears to be a reasonable assumption, a closer look at the use of English in China reveals that China's English language environment is actually much richer than is commonly believed. This paper will show the types of English language material and opportunities to use the language readily available to Chinese students and teachers and suggest ways to raise awareness of them and ways in which they could be used, both in and outside the classroom.

2. English in China

Brown (2000, p. 193) points out that the line between English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts has become blurred and it is no longer easy to distinguish between the two. This is certainly the case with China, usually classified as either an EFL or expanding circle country where English is used primarily as a means for international communication, yet exhibits a high degree of the use of English within the country. English is used fairly extensively in the domains of science and technology, the media, tourism and international connections and business, which means there is a large amount of authentic material, and even opportunities to use the language in real life situations, available for use by students and teachers.

2.1 Newspapers, Magazines, Books and Other Printed Material

There are 19 English language newspapers and magazines in China (Jiang, 2003, p. 7). Some of the better known newspapers are: *China Daily*, *Shanghai Star*, *Shanghai Daily*, *Beijing Weekend* and *21st Century*. As for magazines, *China Today* and *Beijing Review*, both of which focus on politics and current affairs, are probably the most well-known, with others such as *China Pictorial*, *Women of China*, *China's Foreign Trade*, *China's Sports*, *China Screen*, *Chinese Medical Journal*, *Science Bulletin*, *Social Sciences in China* and *Shanghai Pictorial* providing English language material on a diverse range of other topics (Pan, 2005, pp. 185-6). In Shanghai, one can also find free English magazines in hotels, bars and restaurants, which contain information about local events and entertainment options (*People's Daily Online*, 23/08/2006).

A large number of English language books are also available in China. Most bookstores sell classic Western literary works and novels such as *Tess of the Durbivilles*, *Jane Eyre* and *The Scarlett Letter*. Academic texts are also increasingly common, including, perhaps not surprisingly, many books on linguistics and language teaching. One of the main bookstores in Changchun for example, stocked the Oxford Introductions to Language Study (a nine book series), Oxford Applied Linguistics (a 29 book series), the Cambridge Books for Language Teachers (a series of 20 books) and Cambridge Applied Linguistics (a 10 book series). In addition to these, the Xinhua Bookstore and Foreign Language Bookstore in Chengdu had the 10 book Applied Linguistics in Action series and the Thomson English Language Teachers' Books series, consisting of 19 books. As well as these foreign works, some Chinese scholars also write in English. Examples of book length works are: *Language contact and lexical borrowing of English and Chinese: A comprehensive study* (Hu, 2001), *Applied linguistics: Language learning and teaching* (Yi, 2004) and *Linguistic and cultural identities in Chinese varieties of English* (Pan, 2005).

Another source of English language material is translated works. Figures from the China Bibliographic Library indicate 28 500 translated works were published between 1978 and 1990, and another 94 400 such works were published from 1995-2003 (*People's Daily Online*, 10/11/2004). No figures for translations into English were given but much Chinese literature and the works of important political leaders are certainly available in English. According to Hung (2002, p. 331), although much of China's translation efforts are aimed at foreign audiences, there is also a growing trend for English translations of Chinese texts being aimed at Chinese audiences who use them as an aid to learn English.

2.2 Television, Radio and the Internet

In addition to printed material, there are also English language television programs. Many of these are of the language teaching variety but English language television is by no means confined to this genre (Pride & Liu, 1988, pp. 49-55; Zhao & Campbell, 1995, pp. 385-8). Non-teaching programs are mainly on China Central Television 9 (CCTV 9), China's first all English television channel. CCTV 9 began broadcasting on 25th September 2000 and has a number of programs including documentaries, entertainment and news (CCTV 9 website). Here is an example of a day's programming:

12:00am	CCTV News
12:30am	Dialogue
01:00am	China Today
01:30am	New Frontiers
02:00am	Biz China
02:30am	Culture Express
03:00am	CCTV News
03:15am	Learning Chinese
03:30am	Nature & Science
03:55am	Chinese Civilisation
04:00am	Asia Today
04:30am	Around China
05:00am	News Updates
05:15am	Sports Scene
05:30am	Rediscovering China
06:00am	Biz China
06:30am	Documentary
07:00am	China Today
07:30am	Dialogue
08:00am	World Wide Watch
08:30am	Culture Express
09:00am	CCTV News
09:15am	Learning Chinese
09:30am	Nature & Science
09:55am	Chinese Civilisation
10:00am	News Updates

10:15am Sports Scene
10:30am New Frontiers
11:00am Biz China
11:30am Around China
12:00pm News Hour
1:00pm Dialogue
01:30pm Rediscovering China
02:00pm Biz China
02:30pm Culture Express
03:00pm News Updates
03:15pm Learning Chinese
03:30pm Nature & Science
03:55pm Chinese Civilisation
04:00pm News Updates
04:15pm Sports Scene
04:30pm New Frontiers
05:00 pm CCTV News
05:30pm Documentary
06:00pm Biz China
06:30pm Around China
07:00pm World Wide Watch
07:30pm Dialogue
08:00pm Asia Today
08:30pm Culture Express
09:00pm Biz China
09:30pm Rediscovering China
10:00pm China Today
10:30pm New Frontiers
11:00pm News Updates
11:15pm Sports Scene
11:30pm Documentary (CCTV 9 website, schedule for Monday programming)

China's other all-English channel, Guangzhou English Language Channel, broadcasts six hours of programs, repeated twice, for a total of 18 hours of English programming per day, throughout southern China. These programs consist of news, business reports, culture and entertainment, all with a focus on Guangzhou's local conditions and culture (Guangzhou English Language Channel website).

English language programs can also be found on other non-all English channels. For example, *Lu You Wei Shi* (Travel Satellite TV) played *Lonely Planet Pilot Guides* (a travel program) each afternoon and again at night for a period of time in 2003. English movies, usually accompanied by Chinese subtitles, also appear from time to time on local channels and some have their own English news (Pan, 2005, p. 186).

China Radio International, which broadcasts to several Chinese cities and a number of foreign countries, has "290 hours of programming each day to all over the world in 43 languages" (China Radio International website). The English Service broadcasts 145 hours of programs per day, including music (*Easy Morning*, *Music Memories*, *The Pulse* and *All That Jazz*), news (*News and Reports*) and documentary style programs such as *Frontline*, *Voices From Other Lands*, *Biz China*, *China Horizons* and *Life in China* (CRI English website, a and b). Some local radio stations also have bilingual programs (Pan, 2005, p. 186).

Internet cafés, or *wang ba*, are relatively easy to find in China, at least in urban areas, and more and more Chinese are going online. As Jones (2006) points out, although most internet café patrons "play computer games, send and receive emails, and chat online" (p. 162), the internet could also be used to learn English, and it does indeed provide access to vast amounts of English language material, far too much to list here. It is worth mentioning however that there is some locally produced English language content. Both the *China Daily* and *People's Daily* newspapers have online English versions and CCTV 9 and China Radio International maintain English websites offering news and other material in multimedia formats. *Shanghai Town* (http://shanghaitown.online.sh.cn/), an all English website full of information about the city such as housing, transportation and entertainment, was launched in September 2006 (*People's Daily Online*, 23/08/06). One can also make use of the Shanghai Yellow Pages online (http://en.yellowpage.com.cn/index.php). Although these sites are primarily aimed at foreigners, there is no reason why Chinese learners of English cannot use them.

2.3 Public Places

English is clearly visible in public places, appearing on a variety of signs and notices. Many businesses for example have English names, the most notable examples being fast food restaurants such as *McDonalds*, *KFC* and *Pizza Hut*. Other businesses using English names include *China Telecom* and *China Mobile* while banks such as *Bank of China*, *Agricultural Bank of China* and *Commercial and Industrial Bank of China* also have English names displayed along with the Chinese.

English is common in places associated with tourism such as museums, parks and train stations, as well as the commercial districts of big cities. The following is an example of the many English signs at the Giant Panda Breeding Research Base in Chengdu:

PLEASE PROCEED QUIETLY

AND STAY ON TRAILS

ANIMALS FRIGHTEN EASILY

Here is a selection of the English that appears on signs, shops and buildings in and around Chunxi Road, Chengdu's main shopping street:

GOOD WOOD COFFEE

T.K.K. FRIED CHIKEN

CKC ICE CREAM

SYDNEY STYLISTIC COFFEE

SELF SERVICE BANKING

FOOT ZONE

HONGQI CHAIN STORE

CHENGDU DENTAL HOSTIPAL

CHENGDU CITY INFORMATION STATION

2.4 Public Transport

Using public transport is an extremely common activity for most Chinese and English can be found here as well. On some buses in Changchun next stop announcements are made first in Chinese then in English:

The next stop is coming. Guilin Road is coming.

The light train also has this feature, the announcement given first in Chinese then in English as follows:

Hello passengers. The next stop is Jiefang Bridge. Please be ready to get off.

In 2006, an event called Poems on the Underground took place in Shanghai. For the duration of this event, famous English poems, along with Chinese translations, were displayed on the city's metro for commuters to read during their journey (*People's Daily Online*, 14/04/06).

2.5 Interactions in English

One option for those who want to speak English in real life situations is to participate in an English corner. English corners are places such as parks and squares where one can go to practice speaking English with other learners and are common in cities across China (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996, pp. 63-4; Zhao & Campbell, 1995, p. 387). Chen & Hird (2006) describe the English corner at one Chinese university as a place "where students and people from outside the university gather every Friday evening in front of the teaching building to have informal 'chats' in English in order to improve their English" (p. 78).

Recent efforts to correct English in public places, such as on signs and buildings, also present students and teachers with opportunities to use their English in a real world task. As part of Beijing's campaign to ensure all English appearing in the public domain is correct before the 2008 Olympics, the public has been asked to find and send examples of incorrect or faulty English to the campaign's organisers (China Culture website, 25/08/06). One Beijing resident who participated in this campaign said that it "encouraged us to learn more and raise our English level" (quoted in China Culture website, 25/08/06). The Office of the Volunteer Work Coordination Group for Beijing Olympic Games has also requested students, teachers and others able to speak a range of foreign languages, including English, to act as volunteers to help visitors during the Games (*People's Daily Online*, 20/11/07).

A campaign similar to Beijing's took place in Xi'an in 2007, in which students, teachers and others searched for and corrected mistakes on shop signs, street signs, buildings etc. in their local area (*People's Daily Online*, 07/03/07).

3. Using China's English Language Environment

It is therefore possible for Chinese students and teachers to see, hear, and, to a lesser extent, speak English in a variety of situations outside of the classroom. Of course, what is actually available will depend on the area of China in which one resides and the individual's circumstances, but it should still be possible to find some authentic material and perhaps even opportunities to use the language. The two main issues that then need to be addressed are: raising awareness of the amount and type of English language material and opportunities to use the language available and developing ways for students and teachers to use them, both in and outside of the classroom.

3.1 Raising Awareness

Some ideas for things teachers can do to raise their students' awareness of China's English language environment are:

- tell students about the type of material and opportunities available and show them examples
- ask students to brainstorm places and situations where English is used in China
- ask students to collect examples of English from their local community and bring them to class

Before doing such activities with their class, teachers should of course do them themselves, either individually or together with their colleagues.

3.2 Developing Ways of Using English Language Material in and Outside of the Classroom

Knowing about China's English language environment is, however, only part of the equation. As Nunan (1999) points out, students must be taught how to approach and use authentic material and opportunities to use the language available outside of the classroom. This is essentially a question of learning strategies and would entail, for example:

- teaching students about different types of listening and reading, such as listening and reading for gist, for specific information etc.
- teaching strategies for coping with unfamiliar language such as guessing meaning from context
- teaching strategies for organising and managing one's own learning

A discussion of how to implement strategy training is beyond the scope of this paper but a useful summary and example of strategy training in China can be found in Wen (2006) while Ruan (2006) discusses the issue of learner autonomy. Once learners have received appropriate training, they can make use of China's English language environment either independently or as a complement to their current course of study.

Turning our attention to classrooms, some ways in which authentic English language materials could be used in class are:

- use authentic material to show examples of the grammar and vocabulary currently being taught
- build activities around a particular piece of authentic material, for example learning letter writing through examining letters to the editor in *China Daily*
- discuss the materials students bring to class

Such activities would have the benefits of further preparing students for language use outside of class and increasing their motivation by showing how what they are learning is relevant to the outside world (Nunan, 1999).

However, just as the amount and type of English language material and opportunities to use the language available will vary according to different regions of China and individual circumstances, so too will the extent to which students and teachers are able to incorporate them into their learning and teaching. English language teaching in China is, despite some important new developments, still treated as an academic subject, determined by strict, top down education policies, largely based on grammar, reading and translation, teacher centred, product oriented and lacking in resources (Liu, 1998, p. 5). This may well make it difficult to implement some of the suggestions made here but none of them should be completely impossible.

4. Conclusion

Although there is not the same amount of authentic material and opportunities to use English as there would be in say, Australia or England, China nevertheless has a rich and varied English language environment. The authentic materials available range from simple signs to academic texts and exist in print, audio and visual forms. There are also some opportunities to use English to communicate with other learners and in the context of real world tasks. While there may indeed be some difficulties associated with incorporating such material and opportunities into the teaching and learning experience, efforts should be made to do this so that Chinese students and teachers can benefit from the English language environment around them.

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Higher Agricultural Universities Serve for *"Sannong"* by Offering English Human Resources Support System

Youqin Yuan
Tianjin Agricultural College, Tianjin 300384, China
Tel: 86-22-2378-9023 E-mail: cfxyy@126.com

Baole Cheng
Tianjin Agricultural College, Tianjin 300384, China
Tel: 86-22-2378-9023 E-mail: cfxyy@126.com

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Abstract

This paper puts higher agricultural English education how to serve for "*Sannong*" construction as priority, combining the actual market demand, based on teaching reform in the past few years, tries to explore English nurturing model and curriculum system for real delivery the agriculture-related qualified foreign language professionals. The purpose is to improve agriculture-related quality of personnel, expand the *Sannong* development as well as to reform the Agricultural Universities English subject training objectives, and explore new ways in the solutions on *Sannong* issues.

Keywords: *Sannong*, Specialized English, Curriculum System

As we all know that English is the main language of international relations, and is the working language in the United Nations, major international organizations as well as various international academic units. Most of the world's science and technology information is recorded in English. As China's reform and opening up continually deepen the development of inter-cultural exchanges and rapidly expand the scope. Especially after joining the WTO, with the rapid development of economic globalization, China's increasing openness of the international, and information industries to gradually push forward all aspects of life and society. Therefore, the demand for foreign language professionals will be more urgent, the demand for English increased significantly, and the quality of talent on the diversified demands. All of this creates social environment to English-speaking professionals and the basis of social needs, but also to the English professional development provided a good opportunity. In recent years various training institutions, private schools and even foreign universities all enter China, and it is a good trend for domestic foreign language rapid development to improve the level of English language education. Therefore, English diversity education and research is essential.

1. The Statement of Domestic Development

1.1 English education convergence and uniformity

At present, some more developed cities in China has been widely recognized that the importance of English has created a comprehensive learning English atmosphere. But we must also recognize that the convergence and uniformity of the current English education results in narrower performance in the practice has been very prominent. Particularly agriculture and rural economic development fields, the English expertise is also relatively small. Main reasons are, first, English professional institutions set up a relatively late, and have not formed the advantages and features, and the English convergence is lack of "agriculture" characteristics, and other institutions of graduates unable to meet this field. Therefore, as for agricultural universities really face with opportunities and challenges. So agricultural institutions only constant innovation, and establish characteristics English education, create its own brand of subject to seek survival and development, to meet the economic and social purposes. At domestic, there are many good quality research results on English as a purely knowledge, such as English education, linguistics, literature and translation, and other specialized English as a foreign language and literature research fruits. But English plus marketing needs research has only just begun, especially agriculture and English cross study do not have much precedent.

1.2 "Sannong"and the Specialized English Development

"*Sannong*" has been listed as the most important task for the whole party. Development of the rural economy will need a large number of English professional expertise, and the reality is that in China agriculture has been lack of English talent, and this has provided us with opportunities. However, indeed, we must also see that the training zone "agricultural" character English expertise is a kind of innovation, no more experience that we can draw on. Therefore, agricultural universities should be based on the existing prominent foundation to construct characteristic English professional, and training is not only containing solid English professional knowledge, but strong knowledge of agriculture talents to meet rural economic and social development needs. However, the exploration and study on agricultural higher foreign language education how to serve in "*Sannong*" development has just started, and the results of studies in this area also minimal. The database showed that only "The Thinking on English Professional education reform in Agricultural Universities"(Yuan Youqin 2006). "Foreign Language Training Mode of agricultural universities" (Sun Zhanghai 2006), and other papers make a few of observations on agricultural reform institutions English professional.

1.3 The Specialized Trend of Higher Education Services Function

Specialized Institutions of English subject direction is in accordance with the service of field settings. For example, the Medical College English (English medical direction) specialized related to the establishment of the three issues: updated concept of higher education; second, to reform the English education system curriculum goals; Third is English (English medical direction) subject positioning. Therefore, "Strengthening English, understand profession, Broad – range as school characteristics. And set up a backbone courses in Economics and Management institutions positioning professional disciplines: English and economic subjects two majors, and English and management two majors go together. Specialized English in Engineering Institutions: (Business English Language and Literature direction together). Training Objectives: To nurture ethics, intellect, physical comprehensive development, and possess theoretical basis of English, and adapt to the 21st century needs and can working as compound highly qualified personnel in economic, trade, foreign invested enterprises, tourism, culture, and education teaching and translation work. Main courses might be advanced English, senior English writing, English-Chinese Translation, and Foreign Trade English Communication, the International Trade Practice (English version), Business Negotiations (English version), Marketing (English version), English / Literary History and the United States to choose, second foreign language, etc.. Therefore, As an Agricultural College, English subject should be the characteristics with "agriculture" then it may have its own space for development.

2. The Statement of foreign country's development

From the point of view of human resources development and management, some researches in the field have been developed more than 60-70 years in some developed countries of the world and a lot of experiences and lessons. Have been accumulated and developed a modern agriculture for qualified human capital. From the development course of abroad is through the first realization of modernization to promote urbanization, and final solve the income issue of peasants. American economist Schulz's "human capital" theory states that through the investment of human resource to form capital. The manpower investment mainly refers to education investment, health care investment, labour mobility investment. On the whole, workers need have a certain labor knowledge, skills and capabilities, thereby creating value and the value of human capital to become the engine of economic development. It is not only the first time formed a clear human capital theory, and further did the quantitative research on the rate of return of investment in education and education role in economic growth. He expounded on the agricultural education: "There is no world-class farmers, there will be no world-class agriculture. Knowledge is the power of agricultural modernization." Relying on his theory in the 20th century, our country has clearly put forward that China's economic construction should transfer the track to scientific and technological progress and improve the quality of laborers in 1980s. In 1990s formed a strategic thinking of "technology rejuvenation" and "developing agriculture through science and technology", clearly reveals that modern agricultural education is the basis of the development of the agricultural economy.

However, *Sannong* issue is the development planning put forward by our government in recent years with the actual situation of China. The views of Ministry of Education on Higher Agricultural Education services for *"Sannong*" has just introduced in 2007. Specialized English is a special product in English as a second language country. Particularly under the background of the service for "*Sannong",* the training model and English curriculum reform study in the agriculture-related institutions has no precedent. Some data indicate that there is no research results in this field abroad that we can draw on, so we must rely on our own research power, in light of China's national conditions, to explore a viable English personnel training system service to serve for *"Sannong"* construction.

Foreign language teaching theories have not been unable to solve for us the answer to the question, in particular China University English education is the foundation of English teaching in the world is rare. We have to own a Chinese research environment, the characteristics of the transition period in English teaching mode.

3. The Goal and Course System of serving *"Sannong"* of English Education in Higher Agricultural University

3.1 Improve agriculture-related quality of personnel, expand the way of "Sannong" development

3.2 Reform the agricultural university English personnel training objective is an another new way to solve the "Sannong"problems

3.3 Take the advantages agriculture-related English education in Agriculture University

3.3.1 Opportunities of serving for "Sannong" provided by transition period characteristics in University College English teaching

1) Basic English teaching is facing transition

As Graddol (2006:15) predicted: "The time of English just as a foreign language to learn is coming to the end." Many scholars have been questioned for unlimited laying foundation in many universities. Gu Bing (2004) pointed out that the University should be compressed public English learning time. Hu Geng-shen (1998) pointed out "if we still use the old teaching model, in the limited hours continued to 'lay a solid foundation', it is bound to lag behind the needs of the community. Cheng Yumen (2002) and Zhangzhenbang (2003) sated that secondary school graduates after entering university should directly transfer to specialized English learning rather learn common English. Language Learning and Knowledge Learning combining together has become a trend in after- college English time.

2) " A thousand people one face" teaching methods just transferring to the variety teaching

3) Curriculum Requirements need of reform

The *Curriculum Requirements* is not in line with the talent diverse needs under the condition of market economy. The study recommends that college English 4, 6 and TEM 4 and 8 exam, after completing its historic task should change their role timely, set to be a level of examination. That is to say that rather than test the students if they achieve *Curriculum Requirements* to the general standard of English level integrated application capability, and to the services providing to employing units. Thus, the economic university can do to economic characteristics, agricultural universities to highlight the "agricultural" character.

3.3.2 Rational utilization of higher education resources, and reform of specialized English training model to meet the needs of English in agriculture

This study suggests that reasonable use of education resources in agricultural university, and reform English training model to form a system of English language + relative subject curriculum. Compress ratio and proportion of credits in language foundation courses, and the overall teaching model is divided into six modules: Module I of general education courses, II language professionals basic course module, III specialized direction of basic education modules, IV language specialized modules, V specialized direction modules, VI specialized practice teaching modules.

3.3.3 Agricultural colleges teaching pre-reform achieved initial success

The English professional placement rate of graduates of more than 80 per cent, most students working in agriculture, the farmers, farm producing fields, foreign invested enterprises, and agriculture units employment and most of them got laudatory comments by the agriculture-related employing units.

3.3.4 English subject positioning to the University should be channel to foreign language education for easier characteristic curriculum system development

English subject positioning attributable to the foreign language education instead of foreign language and literature, it may firstly give university English teachers higher demands in the knowledge structure. And they must learn foreign language education theory. If the English as a branch of foreign language pedagogy, it is in favor of the comprehensive universities to improve the quality of English teachers, to be conducive to the students English application ability. This is the question having to be considered in transition periods for nurturing characteristic talents.

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Implementing Communicative Activities in English Reading Class

Yonghong Gao
School of Foreign Languages, Shandong University of Finance, Jinan 250014, China
E-mail: yhgao1048@sina.com

Abstract

This paper aims to analyze and expound the implementing of communicative activities in English Reading classroom. It is mainly untaken from these aspects: 1) polishing teacher's role in communicative activities; 2) Specific communicative activities in classroom; 3) Teacher's questions; 4) Teacher's evaluation. It is believed that communicative activities in classroom is an effective way both for teachers' reading teaching and for students' reading learning if they are properly implemented.

Keywords: Communicative activities, English Reading class, Teacher's role, Teacher's questions, Teacher's evaluation

1. Introduction

According to the new national Syllabus for English majors, English Reading class is aimed at training students' English reading comprehension and improving their reading speed: training students' ability of meticulous observation of language, and such logic reasoning abilities as assuming, judging, analyzing and summarizing, improving their reading skills, including skimming, scanning and so on, and helping students enlarge vocabulary, absorb language and cultural background knowledge through reading training. It goes without saying that ability training has become a higher priority. Implementing communicative activities is one of the effective ways to train students' abilities and their absorption of knowledge. As a matter of fact, communicative activities in classroom is an effective way both for teachers' reading teaching and for students' reading learning if they are properly implemented.

By a "communicative activity", we mean motivated activities, topics, and themes which involve the students in authentic communication. In communicative activities, students will find themselves in various real-life situations where the target language must be used. Because the focus is not on learning specific language features but on putting the language to use as the circumstances require, students can learn and acquire the language subconsciously, most importantly, students can learn to use their ideas, pass on their ideas and receive ideas, in this way to enlarge their vocabulary, broaden their knowledge, and be more interested to read more and read better.

2. Categories of communicative activities in classroom

Usually communicative activities fall into four broad categories: (a) the conduct of the English Reading class; (b) topics arising from and relevant to the students' personal life; (c) substantive topics which are educationally or professionally significant; (d) communicative classroom exercises, i.e. small-scale activities that enable students to practice characteristic features of English discourse, especially "pair work", "group discussion", "role play" are frequently used.

3. Polishing teacher's role in communicative activities

3.1 Making work easy

As a communicative activity, the focus is not on the use of any particular grammatical form or speech function. The point is to experience the relationship between language use and task fulfillment. Therefore, the delivery ---lecture, readings, explanations, tasks expected of the students---must be adjusted to the students' level of proficiency. If the subject matter is expressed with unfamiliar vocabulary or if the discourse structure is complicated, it may tax the students unduly. So the chief thing for the teacher is to make meaning evident, that is, to ensure that the language input to the student is comprehensible and is in fact comprehended. In Krashen's terminology, success depends on comprehensible input, so teachers have to be conscious of the students' ability to cope with the new subject matter in an imperfectly known language. Here are the ways:

- Explain terminology more carefully
- Use more visuals and diagrams
- Make the delivery slower and more distinct
- Make the tasks assigned to students appropriately scaled down

Needless to say, exposed to such language conditions, students can, of course, have much confidence, and accordingly have more interests and will more willingly take part in classroom activities.

In fact, the actions and tasks need not be complicated. Especially in the early stages it is quite acceptable, and indeed very satisfying, for students to carry out simple actions and tasks.

3.2 Creating a pleasant atmosphere

Communicative activities are likely to be more difficult to engage in under condition of stress, discomfort, fatigue, emotional distress, or hostility than in a calm and positively toned situation. So it is desirable and necessary to create a comfortable and harmonious atmosphere where students are not afraid to speak and enjoy communicating with others. If the atmosphere in the group or in the class is hostile and the student concerned is afraid of being ridiculed or mocked, inhibition will occur. A relaxed and friendly atmosphere is the first essential requirement. It is of great help for the students to pass on their own ideas naturally if the teacher could be more friendly, encouraging a relaxed attitude, and creating a non-threatening environment.

3.3 Reducing teacher talk

It is universally accepted that language is a means of communication, and that students learn the target language as a communicative tool, not as a system of linguistic knowledge. So students' talk time is very crucial for the students to master the target language and use it in their daily life. If students want to express themselves deeply and fully, they must have adequate time. If teacher's talk dominates the class, students will consequently have little time to discuss, even some students may have no chance to speak before the class is over. Students should have enough time for discussion if the aim of the task is to be attained. It is realistic for teachers to plan carefully to decrease teacher talk time in a time-limited classroom and turn to student-centered approach.

3.4 Improving the quality of teacher talk

In student-centered classroom, teacher should attach more importance to the quality of their talking since their talk time is decreased. According to modern pedagogy, a qualified teacher's language in classroom should be: first, accurate; second, logical; third, standard; fourth, succinct; fifth, rhythmical. This is the basic demand. "Men are intelligent creatures who will feel bored when their intelligent needs can not be met." Said Professor Liu Runqing. So if we want students to show real interest and enthusiasm in participation, what is the most important is "to attract students with the power of knowledge, to excite students with rich content, and to conquer students with the power of wisdom"(Xu Guozhang) What's more, teachers need to convey a sense of self-confidence in using the language.

4. Communicative activities in classroom

4.1 Group work

When the detailed work of the text is over (when reading has been completed), global understanding must be returned to and the text as a whole evaluated and responded to. Usually at this stage is communicative activities used.

Most of the work at this stage is best done orally, since discussion and exchange of views are of its essence. Specific tasks can be undertaken in groups before whole class discussion. Why is work done in groups? In group work, individual efforts are pooled and discussed to arrive at the best interpretation of the text. There are important advantages. Motivation is generally high, provided the tasks are challenging and promoting discussion. Students participate more actively, partly because it is less threatening than participating in front of the whole class and partly because it is more obvious that everyone's contribution counts. And the discussion helps students to see how to read thoughtfully.

Moreover, working in groups makes it possible for students to help one another and, in successful groups, the interaction achieves far more than individuals can working on their own. Helping one another is not only emotionally satisfying, it creates the right conditions for learning. Working together can be very motivating and a slight sense of competition between groups does no harm.

To be useful for group work, a task must specify exactly what is to be done, engage every member of the group and promote vigorous discussion. Some textbook questions or activities are suitable for group work, or you may have to supply extra tasks for this purpose. Well-planned questions make students realize they do not understand, and focus attention on the difficult bits of the text.

It is important to have a classroom climate that encourages students to say what they really think. Neither you nor the students must be afraid to be wrong. You must help them to see questions not as attempts to expose their ignorance, but as aids to successful exploration of the text.

Teacher's attitude to wrong answers is crucial. A perfect answer teaches little, but each imperfect answer is an opportunity for learning-not just for the answerer but for the whole class. If it is partly acceptable, teacher can praise the student for what he has understood, and help him (and his classmates) to find clues that will lead to a completely satisfactory interpretation.

Group discussions are popular 'because the participants were expressing their own ideas rather than performing in a hypothetical situation'. Through discussion, the students can learn the processes of critical thinking that good readers use. Group work is ideal, because in small groups (maximum five members), even the weaker students should be active and learning.

4.2 Role-play and drama techniques

Another way of widening the communicative possibilities is by role-play, scenarios, and other drama techniques. The main interest of these techniques lies in the global use of language in lifelike situations and the deep understanding of the reading materials.

In many cases, these techniques approximate real-life language use to a remarkable degree. The use of language in a dramatic situation is likely to include the full complexity of language use: emotional overtones, posture, gesture, and appropriate actions. So, the more closely the student can identify with the role or task the more it provides a natural language experience. Meanwhile, a better understanding of the reading material can be achieved. Understanding is deepened and made clearer when, for example, the student playing the role of X has to decide-with the help of the others-what x is doing at any given point, what expression he is likely to have on his face, how he will behave towards Y, why he says this rather than that. Take Unit 8 of Extensive Reading 3, this passage tells us that about 85 percent of the people who smoke wish they could stop, and yet they have to go through the agony of quitting. In order to help students have an authentic experience, I asked 4 students to play the roles of Molly, his friends Bill, Mary and Tim. To give a good impression to the class, and to have an impressive performance, the students read the whole article carefully with great interests. After a short-time preparation, each of them played their role vividly, their performance were met with unanimous applause.

It is important to understand that what we have in mind is not a display in which a few students are actors while the others are an audience. On the contrary, the strength of this approach is that everyone is actively involved in suggesting, discussing interpretations and so on.

5. Questions

After group discussion or role-play, the whole class discussion follows in order to have a comprehensive understanding. At this stage, teacher's skill in using the questions is critical.

5.1 Simplifying

The language that you ask questions should be simple, clear, easy to understand, including vocabulary that students are familiar with. It's a necessity that the language of questions be simplified in spite of the profound meaning of the questions.

5.2 Moderating

Questions you ask should correspond with students' level of knowledge, capability of thinking. The purpose of communicating is to tempt the students to express opinions, to exchange different understanding or ideas, is there any point in inhibiting their expression by questions beyond their knowledge and questions that they cannot control?

5.3 Asking thought-provoking questions

The aim of the study is not just to expand knowledge, but also through the analysis and synthesis of information to develop students' cognitive skills training, thinking, and problem-solving abilities. There should not be too many questions related to information, questions that inspire thinking should be asked as many as possible - this is the key to effective teaching.

5.4 Asking challenging questions

Simplifying or moderating questions does not mean asking questions which need easy answers, it's useless or meaningless to ask such questions, or it's a waste of time, in other words. The questions should have a certain degree of difficulty where students' language skills, thinking skills, and level of knowledge are concerned, thus they will be of greater challenge. The correct answers to such challenging questions would bring students much self-confidence, and play an important role in the development of students' abilities.

5.5 Asking follow-up questions

When students' answers are inadequate, incomplete, teachers should continue to ask questions, through such means as giving hints or suggestion to help students give the right answers. When the questions are correctly answered, teachers should also ask further questions on the basis of their answers, so that the questions become more and more profound to inspire students to discuss. Follow-up questions can avoid the one-time interactive phenomenon, increasing students' participation.

5.6 Asking questions relevant to students

If talking about the topics that students understand, and the questions which are related to the experience of the students, students will be more interested, they will have more ideas, they will be more willing to pass on ideas, they will be more open-minded to receive ideas, and subsequently, it will enhance the sense of participation. Especially after the text work, if there are always some questions which are associated with students' life, either outside or inside the campus, it is likely that students will try, more exactly, will be interested to read more to have themselves enriched.

6. Evaluation

6.1 Praising

Praising is the recognition of the capabilities of the students. Particularly, the poor students need praising more, for their self-confidence can be brought back in this way and they can achieve success accordingly. But students of different ages have different needs for the recognition. Along with the growth of age, students hope that they get more recognition of their peers than the verbal praise from teachers. Remember, it's unnecessary to give praise to the specially simple question. Anyway, praising can enhance students' achievement. With progress feedback a student will be able to successfully self-monitor, have higher aspirations for further achievement, greater self-satisfaction, and higher performance overall.

6.2 Encouraging

When students can't answer adequately or when students could not answer questions, teachers should give proper incentives, to provide hints to help analyze the causes. Never use sarcastic comments in order not to dampen the students' self-esteem. Teacher should take a positive attitude toward students' mistakes and take it in mind that errors are natural and inevitable in the process of learning and practicing. Not only that, teachers should encourage students by all manner of means including smile on face, appropriate positive feedback to their work, and so on. Tapping students' resources prove more important than finding faults with them.

6.3 Quoting

Quoting is a kind of indirect recognition. In presenting the answer, or making the conclusion, if a teacher can quote the word that students use, better results will be achieved than using oral praise. Such language as "Just as …said just now, …" will make the student taste the sense of success, recognition, thus arousing enough of their self-confidence to work quietly at the goal of higher learning.

6.4 Gesturing

Besides verbal praising and quoting, gestures and expressions are also helpful in evaluation. Teaching gestures appear in various shapes: hand gestures, facial expressions, body movements, etc. They can either mime or symbolize something and they truly help the students to infer the meaning of the verbal, providing that they are unambiguous and easy to understand. Findings indicate that students generally believe that gestures and other non-verbal behaviors play a key role in communication. There are three types of functions that gestures play in classroom interaction: ①cognitive, i.e., gestures which work as enhancers of the learning processes, ②emotional, i.e., gestures that function as reliable communicative devices of teachers' emotions and attitudes and ③organisational, i.e., gestures which serve as tools of classroom management. These findings suggest that students interpret teachers' gestures in a functional manner and use these and other non-verbal messages and cues in their learning and social interaction with the teacher. Therefore, proper gestures and facial expressions should not be ignored.

7. Conclusion

To conclude, classroom management, different topics, field of discourse and various tasks can present students with a rich variety of communicative events to react to. Implementing communicative activities in comfortable reading classroom will provide more opportunities for subconscious assimilation, and open more channels of communication to the target community at a personal level of contact. Not only teachers but also students will benefit a lot from such activities.

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Talking Terms: Choosing and Using Terminology for EFL Classrooms

Roger Berry
Department of English, Lingnan University
Tuen Mun, Hong Kong
E-mail: rogerb@ln.edu.hk

Abstract

This paper discusses the use of grammatical terminology in English language teaching. Accepting that it is a common feature of many classrooms, the paper attempts to help teachers understand the role and nature of terminology. A distinction is made between terms which are transparent (e.g. 'countable'), opaque (e.g. 'verb') or iconic (e.g. '–ing form'). A number of criteria for evaluating the suitability of terminology for classroom use are also offered. In this way it is hoped that teachers will be better equipped to make well-informed decisions about the terms they choose to use in the classroom.

Keywords: Terminology, Grammar, Pedagogic

1. Introduction: the relevance of grammatical terminology

The use of grammatical terminology in the language classroom has received little practical discussion, perhaps because it is considered incompatible with most approaches to language teaching in the late twentieth century. However, while some critics have associated terminology with all the ills of the grammar-translation method (e.g. Garrett 1986), the majority seem to approve of its limited use, e.g. Woods (1994), Muhammad (1994) and Carter (1995). This quote from Lewis is typical of the positive but cautious approach to that now seems to be current:

> Introducing unnecessary jargon into the classroom is intimidating and unhelpful, but the careful introduction and regular use of a few well-chosen terms can be helpful and save a lot of time over the length of a course for both teacher and learner. (2000:129)

And it does seem to play a part in many classrooms. In my study of secondary and tertiary English teachers' use of and attitudes towards terminology in Hong Kong (Berry 2001), the vast majority reported using 'some' or 'a lot' (46 out of 49 secondary and 21 out of 22 tertiary teachers), as opposed to 'little' or 'none'.

Nevertheless, there are problems with the use of terminology in ELT. In an earlier study of teachers and students on a business communication course I found a trend towards extensive overuse of terminology (Berry 1997). Many terms that the teachers assumed learners to be familiar with were generally unknown, and there was wide variation among the learners. Out of 372 students the scores on a 50-item terminology test ranged from 8 to 35.

Of course, this is not an argument against grammar terminology per se. It merely shows the need for better teacher education. If, as Wright has suggested (1991:68-69), there is a danger in giving teachers specialist knowledge in that that may wish to show it off to learners, then there is a case on training courses for making clear the difference between what teachers need to know and what learners need to know. Similarly, in the classroom teachers must check what terms are known and spend time on those that are not (possibly in self-access mode).

In any case, whether teachers use terminology seems to be determined not so much by methodological factors as by personal ones. There is evidence that one of the majors determinants of terminology use is the teachers' own background, i.e. whether their own teachers used much terminology and whether they have had a formal course in English grammar (Berry 2001:112-115). In a similar vein, Borg (1998, 1999) shows how teachers have practices regarding terminology based on their background beliefs and attitudes. There are also factors outside the teacher's control, such as the presence of terminology in textbooks, or its usefulness for learners in self-study mode. The advisability of having terminology in the L1 context, particularly to help the teaching of writing, is uncontested (Cajkler and Hislam 2002, Robinson 2005).

To exemplify how effective terminology can be if used appropriately, I reproduce below an exchange from Tsui (1995:33) in which a teacher is going through student errors involving the incorrect use of verb forms after modals:

T: <u>You can write programmes, play a game, doing calculations, drawing a picture, etc</u>. I like the idea very much, you've got some concrete examples, but it's not quite balanced so far as grammar goes. OK, what is the *modal* in that sentence?

Ss: Can.

T: Can. OK, and we see here the *modal* (points at the previous sentence on the board)…

(my italics; underlined text represents text being cited)

Tsui is not aiming to promote the use of terminology; her interest is in describing good grammatical explanations. But it is hard to imagine a practical alternative to the use of the term *modal* here (provided students are familiar with it). There will be situations where terminology is not appropriate, as with less advanced, younger or less mature students, but if the classroom focus is on form it appears to be an essential shorthand.

2. Types of terms

How then might teachers approach the use of terminology? How can they answer practical questions like: are there any dangers associated with the terms I use? which terms should I use anyway? in the case of synonyms, why is one term better than another? In the next section I will suggest some criteria that teachers (and trainers) can use for evaluation. But first, in order to raise awareness of the nature of terminology, I would like to present a limited taxonomy of terms.

2.1 Transparency

Transparency is where the meaning of the term indicates what its referent is about (e.g. **countable**). Transparency would appear to be an ideal quality, especially pedagogically. It makes sense to use terms that give learners a clue to the meaning of the term – words which they can 'see through'. Typically the clue is given by the 'meaning' of the grammatical item (the **past** tense 'refers to the past'), but it can also derive from the function, e.g. the job of a **connective** in grammar is to connect.

There are, however, some problems with transparency. Firstly, there may not be an obvious word available to describe a grammatical category or concept. How could we make up a transparent replacement for terms such as **noun**? Would **thing-like word** do?[1]

A more serious problem with such terms is: are they accurate? It is my experience that learners (and teachers) assume this unfailingly to be so (if they know the meaning). Thus the **present** tense is inevitably associated with present time, even though it is well known that it often implies future (*We leave tonight*) or general time (*The sun rises in the east*). This leads some grammarians to call it the **non-past tense** (as opposed to the **past tense**). Another problematic term is **continuous**; a case study at the end evaluates it for transparency and other factors in comparison with **progressive**.

Another problem with using transparent terms is to do with the concept of distinctiveness, i.e. whether the term can be recognised as a term and not part of the regular vocabulary. Terms in scientific grammar achieve this through coinage, e.g. **non-count** or **uncount** in place of **uncountable**. In the pedagogic context distinctiveness is usually a less pressing need, but it comes to the fore when it is necessary to use the word in a non-terminological sense in the same text, as in this example from Murphy (1994):

For the past we use ***must have*** …(page 56)

Does 'past' here imply that 'must have' is the **past tense** equivalent (of *must*) or merely that is used for past time reference?[2]

But perhaps it is too much to expect total accuracy and distinctiveness. The real issue is: does a term help more than it hinders? Or will it mislead learners into misapprehensions about English grammar? Studies of the usefulness of such terms are sadly lacking.

2.2 Opaqueness

Opaqueness is where there is no obvious relationship between the term and its referent (e.g. **adjective**); learners have no clue from the term as to what it is about. Opaque terms are safe because learners will not make any false associations based on them. They come without the complications of already-existing words and can be precise in meaning.

The most common terms in English, those for word classes, are opaque: **noun**, **verb**, **adjective**, etc. Beyond these, however, the majority of pedagogic grammar terms tend not to be opaque. It is only at the level of scientific grammar that we find an abundance of opaque terminology, e.g. **epistemic**, **paucal**, etc. Typically, these words are of Latin or Greek origin, and for those who are familiar with these languages these terms may not be so opaque. And there may be a clue from similar words that have also been borrowed.

The main disadvantage with opaque terms is the learning load they impose on learners. In addition to the concept, a new word has to be learnt, which may be complicated by their length (they tend to be polysyllabic), spelling and pronunciation (the learners may not be familiar with the rules that govern Latinate vocabulary).

2.3 Iconicity

As we have seen, there are problems with both of the above types. There is a third solution to the problem – one that is unique to metalinguisitc terminology - which relies on a formal rather a meaning relationship (or lack of it) between term and referent. If transparent terms are too misleading and opaque terms too difficult, why not simply use the form itself? For example, a teacher can say 'use '-ing' here' (or 'an '-ing' form').

Such iconic terms are limited in their application; situations where a formal feature is distinctive of a grammatical phenomenon are rare. For example, to express **noun** in an iconic way would be impossible; we would have to talk about 'any word that …' and then list several distinctive features. But where they are available, iconic terms represent an unambiguous way of denoting the referent. They may not give any clue to the meaning, as transparent terms do, but this may not be necessary anyway. And they tend to be short.

Here I am thinking about morphemes (rather than words) since they offer the level of generalisation required. However, most basic English morphemes are multifunctional: '-er' is used for the comparative of adjectives as well as agent nouns and '-ed' turns up in the past tense and past participle. Then there is the problem of irregularity; '-ed' is not the only way to refer to past tense and participle. Transformational-generative grammar used to refer to the past participle ending as '-en' – a more distinctive, yet less precise term.

Another issue is how to pronounce iconic terms. Even in writing they may look strange (at least at first) but in speaking they may not be understood at all. There is a choice between either spelling them out ('an I-N-G form' or trying to imitate their pronunciation in connected speech. While either approach might work for '-ing', for the majority of common morphemes the spelled-out version is preferable since the alternative may not be clear; imagine the confusion caused by a teacher saying 'you need an '-er' adjective here'.

Iconicity is applicable only to a limited number of morphemes in English - to those which can be generalised, which means inflectional and a few derivational morphemes. The vast majority of derivational morphemes, e.g. those that turn some verbs into nouns, do not have enough generalisability. You wouldn't say 'No, you need a '-tion' noun here' (however pronounced). Another limitation is that you cannot use them to introduce the form itself: you cannot say 'you form the '-er' form of adjectives by adding '-er' (or '-r')'.

The above discussion has so far concerned the choices facing a teacher when introducing terminology. But we should not forget the possibility of learner-generated terms (Francis 1994). And in this respect iconic terminology is most useful.

2.4 Eponymous terms

A sub-class of iconic terms is what I call 'eponymous' terms. We don't need any special term to refer to a grammatical phenomenon that is one of a kind, for example 'used to'. It would be particularly perverse to invent a term for this (the 'habitual past semi-modal'?). We refer to *used to* (the grammatical item) by saying '**used to**' (the terminological item); it refers to itself. And this of course is what we do all the time without thinking; we use the word itself as a term. The vast majority of terminology (if we want to call it that) falls into this category. There of a lack of distinctiveness but it is surely more economical. The simplest argument against talking about the 'future tense' is that it is simply unnecessary; why not say 'will'? There are, however, two cases where a single word does have its own non-iconic term: the definite and indefinite articles. The reader is invited to judge which type is preferable.

The number of purely iconic terms in English is quite limited, but there are many mixed terms where an iconic element is combined with another. Perhaps the best-known example is **third-person *-s***, where the iconic part comes second, but it is more normal for it to be first, as with e.g. ***-ing* adjectives**, as used in Cobuild and elsewhere. Other common semi-iconic terms are ***wh-* words** or ***wh-* question words**, ***to* infinitive**, ***that* clause**.

2.5 Summary

So which type is best? The answer, for the pedagogic arena, where ease of learning is paramount, must be transparent terms where possible. Iconic terms, though user-friendly and confusion-free, are very limited in their applicability (excluding eponymous terms, of course), and the potential distinctiveness of opaque terms is not enough to set against the learning load they impose. But teachers do need to evaluate transparent terms carefully to make sure they are not misleading.

3. Evaluating terms

In this section I want to discuss what makes a good or useful term in the pedagogic context. It is important to stress 'pedagogic' here; in scientific grammar factors such as distinctiveness and precision of meaning are paramount, but in pedagogic grammar these may conflict with other criteria.

I have already suggested that transparency is a positive feature of pedagogic terms when we are considering the relationship between the term and its referent. However, there are a number of wider factors that need considering. These are **learnability**, **familiarity**, **theoretical validity**, **systematicity**, **utility** and **productivity**.

3.1 Learnability

If learners are to understand, and perhaps use, terms, they need to acquire them in the same way they acquire ordinary vocabulary. This makes ease of learning important. A number of factors are involved:

- length. Many terms are polysyllabic, and are a challenge to the productive or receptive limits of learners.
- confusability. Scientific language terminology abounds with pairs of terms that are easily confused, especially where an ending has been added to make a new item. For example:

  adverb – adverbial
  subjunct – subjunctive

  There is room for only one member of these pairs in pedagogic terminology, even if both concepts are necessary.
- difficulty of spelling/pronunciation. Words of Latin and Greek origin, which many terms tend to be, are harder for most learners – they don't conform to the basic rules of spelling/pronunciation relationships that learners have been brought up on (for example, the pronunciation of final 'e' in 'apostrophe'). There may be other eccentricities, such as the nasal vowel in 'genre'.

This last factor is more relevant in situations where learners are expected to make use of the terms themselves, rather than merely identify what the teacher is referring to.

3.2 Familiarity

Teachers going into a class, or grammarians writing a grammar, do not have a free choice; they must ask themselves what prior knowledge their learners/readers bring with them. Some grammarians might want to introduce a totally new terminology, free of all the inconsistency and problems of the current terms, but traditional English grammatical terminology is firmly ensconced in EFL/ESL culture, and innovators ignore this at their peril.

The same is true of those working with teachers. The difficulty of devising new (functional) terminology is articulated by Lock and Tsui, in attempting to provide the terminology for a database of English grammar:

> In achieving this aim, we were mindful that it was important not to devalue the kind of knowledge about grammar that many of the teachers already have. Moreover, to help teachers in their construction or re-conceptualisation of grammar knowledge, we must start from their existing knowledge. In particular, we wanted to avoid giving teachers a new set of terms to talk about what they may feel they have long been able to talk about quite satisfactorily in their own terms. (2000:19)

Similarly, Walsh (2003), discussing a course for trainee-teachers, laments the absence of metalanguage for talking about interactional processes.

3.3 Theoretical validity

This criterion refers to whether the terminology is consistent with the theories of language and language learning that underpin the teaching. I am thinking in particular of the distinction between meaning and form-based terminology. To some extent, this criterion is at odds with the previous one; since most of the terminology is form-based and is firmly ensconced, there is little room for theoretical manoeuvring.

Nevertheless, there are certain situations where teachers have a choice, or need to appreciate the theoretical overtones that accompany a term. The choice between **'if' sentences** and **conditionals** (on the surface a choice between a partly iconic term and a semi-transparent one) is also a matter of form versus meaning. The two are not entirely synonymous; there are **'if' sentences** which are not conditional in meaning and other ways of expressing conditions that do not use 'if' (e.g. via inversion).

Meaning-based teaching is of course possible with form-based terminology, but there is a danger of the dog wagging the tail: because most current terminology is form-based, teachers (and textbook writers) may be lured into focusing on formal features exclusively and ignoring any connection with meaning.

3.4 Systematicity

What this concept means in the classroom, as well as in grammars, is that terms cannot always be chosen in isolation; they need to fit in with other terms which belong to the same system. For example, there is little point in using **definite article** without **indefinite article** (and vice versa), and the same is true for many other pairs such as **past** and **present**, **singular** and **plural**. The issue is slightly different when one of the two terms in a pair is marked (e.g. **passive** as opposed to **active**), but even here once the marked term has been introduced we will struggle to do without its partner. Another issue is whether the superordinate term is needed; the answer is generally not. Thus **voice** can be dispensed with; teachers can simply say 'use the passive here'.

3.5 Utility

What I mean by utility is: how many words does the term apply to and how important are those words? In other words, how frequently is the term likely to appear in teaching? There is no point introducing a term that will have little use. A term like **plural** can apply to all nouns (and to some pronouns and determiners) and so has a high utility value.

3.6 Productivity

Productivity is to do with whether a term can be freely combined with other terms to refer to related concepts; 'combinability' might be another way of saying it. Through productivity the number of terms needed can be reduced, or the number of concepts referred to can be increased. For example, **tense** is productive as a term because it can go with **present** and **past** (and maybe **future**) and all the further combinations such as **present perfect ____**. Productivity is particularly appropriate with iconic terms. For example, once you decide to use a term like '-ing' you find that it can be used in a number of terminological phrases: '-ing participle', '-ing adjectives', '-ing nouns'.

4. A case study: progressive vs continuous

These two terms apply to the same grammatical concept, namely one option in the aspect system of English (*I am singing*); they may be said to be synonymous. But which is preferable?

Both terms are transparent, but **continuous** is more obviously so. Learners can easily identify it with the idea of continuity, especially if its explanation goes something like this: 'you use continuous forms for actions that are continuing'. The problem is that continuous forms often do not refer to continuous actions (*He's been ringing all day*), while other forms can have an idea of continuity (*I've lived here for years*).

Progressive is less likely to be misleading; its basic meaning of 'modern/eager for change' bears little resemblance to anything grammatical, and if it is associated with the idea of something being 'in progress', then it can be argued that this is more accurate (see e.g. Huddlestone and Pullum 2002:163).

In terms of learnability, there is little to choose between them (though I have found that some learners confuse **progressive** with **possessive**). In terms of theoretical validity, utility and productivity there is no difference; both are, respectively, form-focussed, likely to be frequently used, and available for combination with other items such as **present** and **past**).

It is in familiarity that the greatest difference lies. From personal experience **continuous** is much better known among learners and teachers, and my study of Hong Kong students (Berry 1997) supports this: **present continuous tense** was known to 94.6% while **present progressive tense** was known only to 7.6%. In a parallel survey of first-year English majors at universities in three countries there was a similar picture: in each case the former was better known (to 80 versus 36 out of 98 Polish students, to 32 versus 26 out of 75 Austrian students, and to 112 versus 16 out of 123 Hong Kong students).

However, in scientific grammar, **progressive** is the term of choice (e.g. in Huddlestone and Pullum 2002, Biber et al. 1997, Quirk et al. 1985; of these, only the latter refers to **continuous**, as an alternative term, while the other two make no mention). And this may be influencing pedagogic grammars; Swan (1995) likewise only mentions **progressive**.

So which term should teachers choose? There is no easy answer here. It is a trade-off between the potentially misleading transparency of **continuous** and the more accurate but less transparent nature of **progressive**, as well as between the popularity of **continuous** and the lack thereof of **progressive** (though this may be changing). It may be best then for learners to be familiar with both; while they are likely to encounter one in the classroom, the other may appear in a reference grammar, without any cross-reference.

5. Conclusion

From all the above discussion, it can be seen that there is always a trade-off when selecting and using terms. In terms of type, transparent terms seem to be preferable, given their ease of learning, but they suffer from a number of problems. They can be misleading, they are rarely available and they lack distinctiveness. Opaque terms by definition cannot mislead but impose a learning burden on the learner. Iconic terms (if we exclude the eponymous sub-class) are again rare of application, but are easily identifiable.

In terms of the criteria for evaluating terms, there are similar trade-offs. Familiarity, for example, may be at odds other criteria. In other words, the perfect term does not exist. But this makes it all the more important for teachers to be able to evaluate the relative merits of the terms they choose to use.

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Notes

1. In fact, German attempts this for **verb**: 'Zeitwort' (literally 'time-word'). But 'Verb' also exists.

2. There is a traditional, opaque alternative for **past**, namely **preterite** (McArthur 1996:722), and this is used in the Cambridge Grammar of the English Language (Huddlestone and Pullum 2002). However, it has no currency in pedagogic circles.

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An Action Research Plan for Developing and Implementing The Students' Listening Comprehension Skills

Chunpin Luo
The School of Foreign Languages, Yunnan Nationalities University
No.134, Yieryi Dajie, Kunming 650031, China
Tel: 86-871-643-5063   E-mail: p_luo21@yahoo.com

Abstract

This is a proposal for an action research plan designed to find out how to improve students' listening comprehension skills, enhance their performance and help to promote better learning. This plan is focused on the minority students who major in English in our University. Listening comprehension is one of the most difficult courses for them. As their teacher, the author would like to conduct an action research in her classroom teaching in order to make some changes in her teaching, to assist the students to become active listeners, and to improve their overall listening comprehension skills.

Keywords: Action research, Listening comprehension, Minority students

1. Introduction

Listening is the basic language skill in language learning. However, students always think it is difficult to listen well. To foster the students' listening comprehension skills and prepare them as active listeners in language learning is a big challenge. Scholars and researchers have done a lot of research to help students to acquire the skills. However, we cannot rely on some methodologies completely. We might see that apart from the methodologies, we also need to know that we face individual student differences: their learning styles, their backgrounds, and their cultures in teaching. In different classrooms, teachers have to adopt different teaching methods to be with their own students. Action research offers an opportunity for classroom teachers to do the research by themselves, improve their teaching, and make adjustments when necessary. This paper intends to propose an action research plan and attempts to inquire into the educational situation, understand the students' skills and their situation better and act to improve both. (Kanu, Stansky & Carson, 1993).

2. Problem statement

I am an EFL teacher in a Nationalities University in China. My students are in the first and second year of University. They major in English. I teach the course called "Listening Comprehension". The aim of the course is to train the aural skills of the students so that they understand English. According to the curriculum, I use a set of text-books "Step by Step" with tapes attached, published by Shanghai Huadong Normal University in China. I also use other authentic teaching aids, such as movies on tape and BBC and VOA (Special English for Learners) on radio, etc. in my listening comprehension course.

During more than twenty years of teaching, I have found that it is very difficult for my students to understand English through listening. In language learning, when we talk about five basic skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating, we always put "listening" at the beginning of them. That is because listening is the most important skill of the five and also the basic way of receiving language input. As we know we can speak sensibly only if we understand what is said. In fact, people cannot talk if they cannot hear other people's talk. That simply means there is not enough language input and there is no output. No deaf person can speak clearly because he cannot hear clearly. So listening skills are one of the basics of learning languages and acquiring them is very important in language learning. Moreover, with the development of high technology, we more and more rely on our ears to get information. There is no doubt that the speed of getting information is faster through listening than reading. Thus, it is crucial to improve the level of listening comprehension of my students.

Usually, in the lab, the students feel at a loss when listening to some new text. Over 50% of the students could not understand the meaning of the material after I play the tape for the first time. Expecting them to understand the material, I often give them some instructions and to play the tape again, at least three times. Still, at least 20% of students might not understand it. And then, I sometimes have to stop the tape to explain the difficult or unfamiliar words and occasionally explain material sentence by sentence through the whole text. So, this is a serious problem because some students cannot understand the whole text after listening to it three times in class. Furthermore, the students might gradually lose their self-confidence. They are afraid to go to the lab to listen to English again. When they are face to face with English speaking people, they have little confidence in their listening comprehension abilities. Therefore, they may not understand them because they have to battle the psychological suggestion that they could not understand spoken English.

Some courses might be the reason hindering the students from understanding spoken English. First, our students begin to learn English by the way of reading, instead of listening. Most students are from different minority areas. In some schools, there are no language labs to train their listening skills. Listening activities are not common for the students. When they come to university, they cannot adjust their study habits very quickly. They still rely on their eyes instead of their ears to learn English. In fact, reading is different from listening, like writing is different from speech. The biggest difference is that speech consists of sounds. Listeners must know the sound system; otherwise, they cannot understand speech. Moreover, writing uses different language. Written English consists of neat, correct sentences, while speech does not.

Second, the materials on the tape are usually read by English speaking people. There are different accents, difficult idioms and unfamiliar language chunks in their speaking. This is another difficulty. For our students, their English teachers are usually local people. So the students may not be used to the accents of the foreign people. It is hard for them to understand native speakers.

Third, when English-speaking people speak English, they usually speak at a normal speed. It is too fast for our students to follow. When listening, the students cannot choose a comfortable listening speed, they have to keep pace with the speaker's thinking process. So sometimes they have not even got the meaning of the first sentence, before the second sentence has already passed. Their results show that they have missed the whole passage.

Finally, the contents of the tape are not always familiar with our students. Some of them are not relevant to our students. Our students may lack the background knowledge about foreign countries and cultures. So sometimes they cannot understand the material or they may misunderstand the meaning of it.

Therefore, I am researching the problems of our students' listening comprehension and intend to find out what can be done to help them improve their listening skills. With the results of this research, the department will be able to implement a plan to develop the students' listening skills. So I would like to do some interventions to see whether I can improve their abilities in listening comprehension.

3. Research questions

What is the initial listening ability?

How do the new tapes affect the acquisition of listening skills?

What do the students do in developing their own listening skills?

How do they become active listeners?

4. Review of literature

Geoffrey E Mills states "Action research has the potential to be a powerful agent of educational change. Action research helps to develop teachers and administrators with professional attitudes that embrace action, progress, and reform rather than stability and mediocrity" (p. v). In the article of "An overview of the methodological Approach of Action Research," Rory O'Brien defines action research as "learning by doing" – a group of people identifies a problem, does something to resolve it, sees how successful their efforts were, and, if not satisfied, tries again (p. 28). According to Carson, Kanu, and Stanski, "Action research is, therefore, an attempt to inquire into our educational situations, understand them better and act to improve them" (p. 1). These theories gave me ideas about why and how to do my action research to improve the students' listening comprehension skills in my class.

An additional literature review assisted me in planning my interventions. One study talks about the theory of listening comprehension and practice. According to the author, the purpose of listening is to get a reasonable understanding of what the speaker said, not the "correct" understanding (Brouwer, 2002). Another study found that listeners constructed meaning from the oral input by drawing upon their prior knowledge of the world and of the target language (Byrnes, 1984; Nagle & Sanders, 1986). Ming Yee Carissa Young did a piece of action research and found that the use of the cognitive strategies Inference and Elaboration were the most salient to many of the listeners, especially when they did not know the topic of the spoken message before listening (pp. 35-53). Brouwer stresses that listening is many things, most often taking place in an interactive process where listening and speaking take place simultaneously (2002). In his study, Wang (2006) summarizes that applying action research in teaching English listening helps teachers to find problems in their teaching systematically and resolve them accordingly, and consequently improve the teaching of English listening effectively.

5. Research Plan

5.1 Intervention

First, I would like to require my students to listen to English attentively in and out of class and give them assignments to listen to the radio or tapes after class and make morning reports on what they heard on the previous day. Second, I would require them read foreign newspapers, esp. the latest news and other various articles wherever they can find them in order to enlarge their knowledge and get familiar with different cultures. Third, I would arrange the recorded materials at the speed of 100 words per minute to be used at the beginning of the course to attempt to provide them with an easy transition to be a successful listener. Finally, I would discuss and adopt some skills and strategies in listening to adequately prepare their confidence in listening to English.

5.2 Data collection

The first research question is: What is the initial listening ability? I would collect data by:

requiring students to do a pre-test,

checking their College Entrance Examination scores,

interviewing students to ask open-ended questions.

The second research question is: How do the new tapes affect the acquisition of listening skills? I would like to collect the data by:

requiring students to do a pre-test on previous materials,

observing the students' own reflection on process,

requiring students to do a post-test on new materials.

The third research question is: What do the students do in developing their own listening skills? I would like to collect the data by:

requiring students to listen to English after class, such as news, short stories, songs and etc., and keep journals,

requiring students to do extracurricular reading, including foreign newspapers and periodicals,

requiring them to make a report on the radio news in class.

The final research question is: How do they become active listeners? I would like to collect the data by:

observing students' activities in class and keeping journals,

requiring other teachers to observe the students in my class and their own classes and to keep journals,

checking students' scores in my class and other classes,

requiring students to do a post-test.

Those pre-tests are chosen from CanTEST (Canadian Test of English for Scholars and Trainees). The post-tests are taken from TEM (Test in English Major – Grade Four).

5.3 Statement of Resource

Equipment for recording and a technician to make a perfect recording are needed. Foreign teachers are needed to record the listening materials we require. We need time both for the researchers and cooperating teachers. The CanTEST and The TEM (Grade Four) are needed.

5.4 Membership

Two teachers who teach Listening Comprehension, Miss Li and I, will share the tasks in this study. I will focus on Class One and Miss Li will focus on Class Two. Another two teachers, Ms. Zhang and Mr. Wang, who teach Intensive English and Extensive English in the same grade, will be invited to be our critics in the action research. They will observe the students in listening classes and their own classes and keep journals.

5.5 Negotiations

"Because action research is carried out in real-world circumstances, and involves close and open communication among the people involved, the researchers must pay close attention to ethical considerations in the conduct of their work" (Rory O'Brien 1998). So my action research plan will be presented to the Dean with the intent of getting approval, seeking support and financial aid. It will also be made known among all the teachers in the department in teachers' meetings to seek understanding and collaboration. Finally, consent forms will be signed and collected from participants in the study.

5.6 Analysis and interpretations of data

After compiling the results of pre-tests, post-tests, interviews, and journals, we, researchers and critics, will sit down together to compare, analyze and evaluate initial data collected to the data from the end of the study. We will review what we have learned and draw conclusions about we think the data mean. We will then decide whether to do more research or to determine which steps to take next. Finally, we will prepare a report of the study, including follow-up action. This report will be presented to the Dean with the hope that our department will be able to implement a plan to develop the students' listening comprehension skills.

5.7 Timeline

Phrase I (July – August) Identify area of focus, review related literature, develop research questions, prepare the paper work of the action research and invite two foreign teachers to record new materials for the listening comprehension course.

Phrase II (September – October) Collect initial data from pre-test and interview students. Use new tapes in classes, observe the whole class and evaluate present practices.

Phrase III (October – November) Modify the teacher's input in class, continue practice and collect data.

Phrase IV (December – January) Collect data from post-test, compare and evaluate initial data collected to the subsequent data. Prepare a report of the study, including follow-up action.

6. Conclusion

This study has developed an action research plan, only the initial step of this enquiry. "Stephen Kemmis has developed a simple model of the cyclical nature of the typical action research process. Each cycle has four steps: plan, act, observe, reflect" (Rory O'Brien, 1998). In the plan, the author aims at exploring possibilities for applying action research in her teaching practice in order to improve teaching practice in listening in the classroom, and furthermore to develop and implement the students' listening comprehension skills.

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Thematic Progression Analysis in Teaching Explanation Writing

Xueqian Yang
Foreign Languages Dept., Hainan Normal University, Haikou 571158, China
Tel: 86-898-6674-7087 E-mail: yangxueqian@gmail.com

Abstract

Thematic Progression theory explains textual meanings of how experiential and interpersonal meanings are organized in a linear and coherent way. Employing the rationale of T-P theory, this article analyses a lesson plan of teaching Explanation, and shows that T-P analysis can be employed in teaching writing.

Keywords: Thematic Progression, Teaching writing, Rationale

1. Introduction

The using of Themes reveals the organization of a text on all levels. Theme, according to Halliday (1994:38), is “what the message is concerned with: the point of departure for what the speaker is going to say” in a clause. At the level of a clause complex (paragraph), the first clause will be taken as the theme (topic sentence), while at the level of a text, the first clause or clause complex will be regarded as the departure of what the author is going to say in the article (Butt, Fahey, Feez, Spinks & Yallop, 2000). On the other hand, Rheme includes what the author wants to tell about the Theme, which should be new and interesting to the reader (according to the writer). While using Theme as signposts and Rheme as information fills-in in presenting new knowledge to readers, a writer used to develop new Themes from elements (Themes or Rhemes) mentioned in the last clause or clause appeared not long ago or the topic clauses. In doing so, he/she can keep the article a well-organized unity with a clear line of information development and a clear focus on the topic. The progression of new Themes is called Thematic Progression (Butt et al, 2000), which has textual meanings of how experiential and interpersonal meanings are organized in a linear and coherent way. The following example text shows one of the styles of Thematic Progression. For example:

//<u>Phonetics and phonology</u> are concerned with speech—with the ways in which humans produce and hear speech.//<u>Talking and listening to each other</u> are so much part of human life//<u>that they</u> often seem unremarkable.//

```
T—R
   ↓
   T—R
   ↓
   T—R
```

T-P analysis (Butt et al, 2000: 143)

In this lesson, I am going to use Thematic Progression in teaching my students Explanation writing. Explanation genre writing is a requisite in the syllabus of the writing course for non-major English learners in Chinese universities, especially for sciences majors. This is because one of the students’ goals of learning English is to communicate with international counterparts in their majoring disciplines, and Explanation genre is very often used in such areas to account for why things are as they are. Students for whom this lesson plan is designed are geography majors. In the discipline of geography, Explanation is often used to explain natural phenomenon.

2. Lesson Plan

This lesson plan is part of the syllabus of a writing course designed for the non-major EFL learners in a Chinese university. The syllabus encourages skills integration, despite of its focus on writing. Students for whom this lesson plan will be used are geography majors, but they have been learning English (a requisite foreign language in Chinese schools and universities) for many years. Most of them can read normal articles in their discipline without much difficulty. One of the challenging difficulties is the size of the class, 50 students in a classroom, which is a common phenomenon in Chinese universities. The topic of this lesson is Explanation writing, with the aim of improving students' skills in writing and objectives of students' abilities in analyzing information organization as well as using Themes correctly in writing an Explanation passage. After this lesson, students are expected to be able to understand information progression in Explanation passages and use Themes attentively to address readers in their writing. Resources used in this lesson are a sample text and a writing task of Explanation. The teaching strategy is task-based, while activities are collaborative learning, peer conferencing and group work discussion.

3. Rationale

The reason of choosing Thematic Progression analysis in teaching Explanation is that T-P analysis can best demonstrate how writer gives NEW information on the base of GIVEN information. The function of Explanation is to explain things. As a basic feature of Explanation, NEW information is developed on the base of GIVEN information by repeating one of the elements in the previous clause as the Theme of the next clause, in order to organize the article in a cohesively and orient readers from known to unknown. Hence, in Explanation writing, an awareness of information progression and skills of using of Themes to organize information sequence are crucial.

In choosing teaching materials, students' interest should be taken into account. My students are geography majors, so I deliberately choose a sample text and a writing task of Explanation in the same discipline. Hopefully these will meet students' interest and make them feel comfortable and significant in doing the task.

The main activity used in this lesson is a pair-work writing task. Students are required to do the task of writing in pairs, with one student cares for the content and grammar while the other student pays special attention to the organization of information. The rationale for pair-work is that an individual student might not be able to care for content, grammar (and sometimes vocabulary) and information organization at the same time, since students are not familiar to the skill before. A students set aside on information organization can guarantee a focus on the skill. Moreover, pair-work encourages collaborative learning and reduces anxiety. Another task is an activity of peer conferencing, a step advocated as effective by the approach of process writing (White & Arndt, 1991). The strategy of task-based approach has been acknowledged in motivating learners (Nunan, 1989; Skehan, 1996). In this lesson, an authentic task in the interest of learners, as mentioned above, must be able to amplify the motivation.

This lesson presents the skill of T-P analysis for the first time. (Since it is an EAP syllabus for largely science majors, text types such as Narrative and Personal Recount are not included. The text types of Information Report and Factual Recount, which precede Explanation in the syllabus, are regarded as too simple to get T-P theory involved.) As a skill to be mastered and consolidated, it should be recycled in the following lessons. The next lesson in this unit should provide more challenging tasks for students to practice. And the T-P theory in higher levels—in clause complex, paragraphs, or even text, can be introduced. In the next unit, Exposition, T-P theory should also be used and the two text types can be compared in styles of information organization. Another point worth mentioning is that this lesson meets the requirement of skills integration, which is encouraged by the syllabus. At the end of this lesson, teacher will draw implication of the use of T-P theory in other courses such as reading and listening comprehension. According to skills integration, the T-P theory should also be recycled in other courses as well.

One possible difficulty in using this lesson plan is the challenge of introducing the functions of Theme and Rheme briefly in such a short time. Theme and Rheme are not difficult to understand, but after all they are new things to students, because students have never heard about functional grammar before. If teacher is not confident in doing it, an alternative way is to avoid the terminology of Theme and Rheme, and use GIVEN and NEW information instead (use the text in Appendix 3-1 and T-P pattern in Appendix 3-2). The pair of GIVEN and NEW is not always equivalent to the pair of Theme and Rheme, e.g. the 3rd clause, but as general the GIVEN information serves as a line on which information is organized (see the complex T-P pattern in Appendix 3-2). Or, if time permits, the T-P pattern in Appendix 3-2 can also be used as a complement to Appendix 3-1.

Another difficulty may come from the large class size. 50 students fall into 25 pairs when they are doing the writing task. It is unavoidable that some pairs may have not mastered the T-P analysis (explained in the 2nd step of the lesson plan) so well and don't know how to follow the rules of information organization. Teacher should patrol the classroom and supply as much help as possible, in either the step of doing this task or the next step of peer conferencing. In case teacher finds that students have certain problems, he can still summarize the T-P theory pertinently as a make up at the ending step.

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Appendix 1: A Lesson Plan of Teaching Explanation Writing

Functional Grammar Focus: Thematic Progression

Text Type Focus: Explanation

Class Profile: Non-major (Geography) EFL learners of intermediate level, large-size class (50 students)

Learning Outcomes: After this lesson, students will be able to: a), Explain the way of information organization in Explanation through analysis of sample text's thematic progression. b), Write an eligible Explanation passage

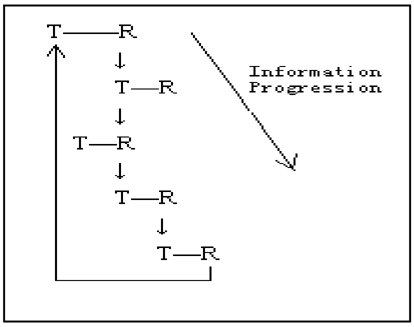
.Step / Time	Procedures / Activities	Resources	Rationale
1. Review and orientation (5 min)	● Briefly review generic features of Explanation (taught in the last lesson). Ss and T work together to fill in a blank table. ◆ Question & Answer (T-S)	Transparency & projector A table of main features of Explanation. (Appendix 2 as reference)	➢ Introduce new knowledge by reviewing the knowledge students have acquired. (K-W-L). ➢ Guiding students from general knowledge of the Explanation genre to the focus of its discourse features.
2. Thematic progression analysis (15 min)	● T analyzes the thematic progression of a sample Explanation text. Draw a T-P pattern. Focusing on: ◆ What's given information? ◆ What's new information? ◆ Why arrange like that?	Transparency & projector A sample text of Explanation, which has been used in the last lesson when introducing general generic features of Explanation. The sample text's T-P pattern. (Appendix 3-1 as reference)	➢ T-P pattern analysis help Ss understand the structural expression of cohesion: why the author arranges his writing like that. ➢ Theme and Rheme in each clause uncover the rules of giving new information.
3. Pair-work writing task (15 min)	● Ss work in pairs in writing an Explanation passage on a topic of "How Typhoon Comes into Being". (A thinks about content and grammar, while B concentrates on information arrangement, then discuss). ● Teacher patrols and help.	Transparency & projector - The sample text's T-P pattern shown for Ss' reference while they are doing.	➢ Task-based approach motivates students in learning. ➢ Pair-work encourages collaborative learning, facilitates interaction and reduces anxiety. ➢ Individual work might not guarantee the focus on information arrangement. Authentic task appeals to Geography students.
4. Pair-work peer conference (7 min)	● Ss exchange their works and do peer conference. A group of four, one pair checks another pair's work, focusing on information progression. Discuss and then give feedback. Teacher patrols and help.	Ss' works.	➢ Combine process-approach with genre-approach in teaching of writing.
5. Summary (3 min)	● T summarizes thematic progression. Draw implication on reading and listening.	Transparency & projector - The sample text's T-P pattern shown while for reference.	➢ Integrate the skills of writing with similar ones in reading and listening comprehension. Consolidate the learned skills.

Appendix 2: Generic features of Explanation

Text Type	Purpose	Organizational Structure	Features	
			Grammatical features	Other Features
Explanations	To explain how and why something works in a particular way or why something happened. e.g. explaining how computers work or why erosion occurs.	The focus is on explaining a phenomenon in a logical sequence: ● Statement about the phenomenon. ● Explanation of how/why the phenomenon takes place. ● Recommended action/response (optional)	● Generalized participants, things usually non-human. ● Connectors to do with time and cause-and effect (e.g. first, then, following, finally, if/then, so, since). ● Passive voice. ● Simple present tense for timeless statements, Past tense. ● Verbs and verb phrases—mainly action verbs.	● Vocabulary—general technical vocabulary ● Visuals (e.g. diagrams, photos) ● Style—relatively objective, formal ● Layout and presentation –may use headings, sub-headings, columns, text boxes, hypertext

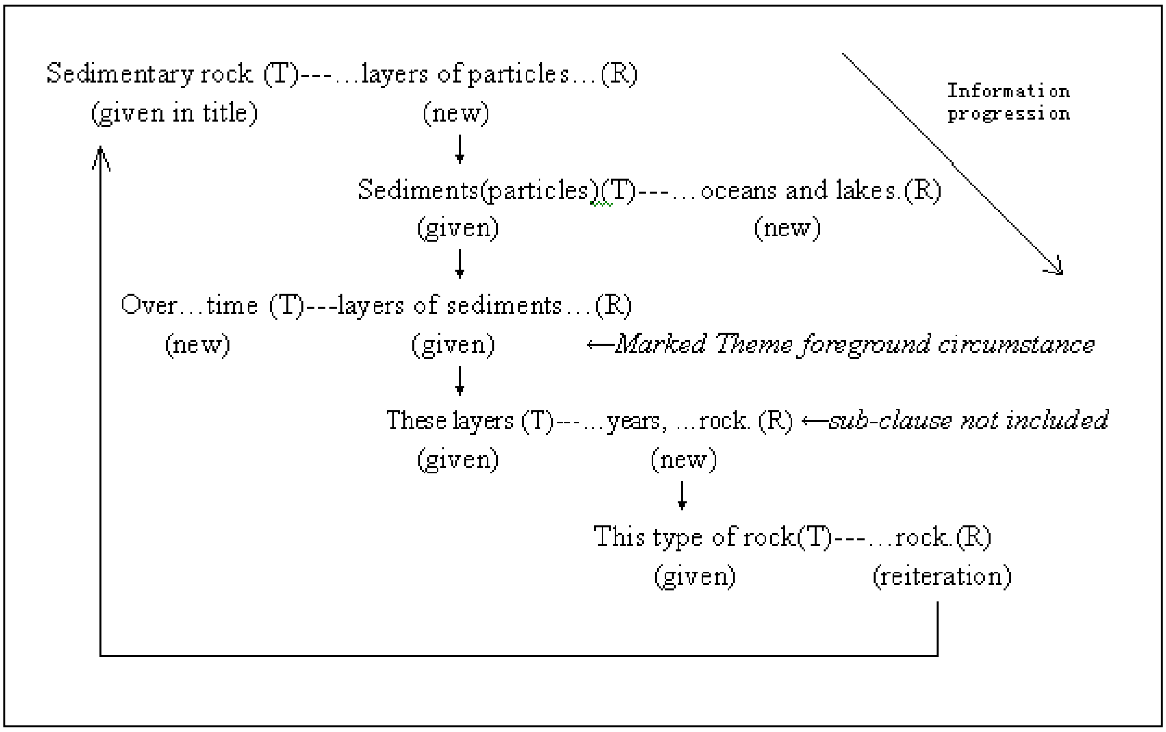
Appendix 3-1: How are sedimentary Rocks Formed? T-P pattern

[1]Sedimentary rock is formed by the compression of layers of particles into a solid form. [2]Sediments such as sand and mud settle onto the floors of oceans and lakes. [3]Over a long period of time, several layers of sediments collect on the floor. [4]These layers are pressed together for many thousands of years, fusing the small solid particles of mud and sand to form solid rock. [5]This type of rock is called sedimentary rock.



Source: Wee, B. G. (2005), handouts for MAE 629

Appendix 3-2: More complex T-P pattern



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The Role of Online Collaboration in Promoting ESL Writing

Jessie Wai-ching CHOI
Room 1208, HKU SPACE, 28 Wang Hoi Road, Kowloon Bay, Hong Kong
Tel: 852-3762-2281 Email: jesschoi@yahoo.com

Abstract

The study examined an ESL writing class, which consisted of 36 students, at a community college of Hong Kong. The students took part in three online collaborative writing tasks by sending drafts to peers who gave them suggestions and comments for improvement and working together on the completion of the writing tasks via email.

The 36 students worked in small groups of four to six. They wrote, responded and revised using the email system offered by the WebCT interface of their course book. The results were evaluated by means of questionnaire, interview with participating students, report of the peer observer, written work, e-responses and reflective summaries of students.

The overall results suggest that students generally enjoyed the supportive atmosphere created by online collaborative tasks and regarded the use of online collaboration as a means of improving their writing by enhancing their motivation, awareness of the audience and the importance of revising, and by reducing their stress and cultivating their positive attitudes towards writing. The data show that the inclusion of the online component has potential in supporting learning and bringing about positive learning effects on writing as learners were found to enjoy the benefit of interacting with the other learners both in-class and out-of-class in the study.

Keywords: Peer writing, Online collaboration, E-learning, Online learning, ESL writing, Collaborative writing

1. Introduction

For decades, the use of information technology has been increasing in higher education and educational research has demonstrated that different ways of integrating the use of technology into classroom teaching have different effects on learning. In many cases, learning can be enhanced through the experience of a shared environment for discussing and working together. As an educational pedagogy that promotes learners' autonomy and improves their writing skills, online collaboration has the potential to promote students' learning (Curtis & Lawson, 2001; Kaplan, 2002). This study therefore tries to explore the use of online collaborative writing in ESL writing classes with the students of a community college in Hong Kong. The underlining assumption of the study is that online collaboration can help improve students' writing skills by

- motivating them to write
- enhancing their sense of audience
- teaching them the importance of revision
- reducing stress in writing
- cultivating positive attitudes towards writing

Specifically, the purpose of the study is to find answers to the following questions:

1. Does online collaboration help improve students' writing? If so, does it help
   - 1.1 motivate them in writing ?
   - 1.2 increase their sense of audience?
   - 1.3 teach them the importance of revision?
   - 1.4 reduce their stress in writing?
   - 1.5 cultivate positive attitudes towards writing?
2. Is peer help beneficial to the students' writing process?
3. What are the limitations of the use of online collaboration in the proposed context?

2. What is Online Collaboration?

Collaborative learning has a long historical tradition and has been studied for many years. Two strong advocates of collaborative learning are Piaget and Vygotsky, who point out that learners can learn better in an environment that encourages co-operation and interaction. A great deal of research has been done in this area and results have indicated that the collaborative process can result in better motivation, higher performance and better thinking skills (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1990; Bruffee, 1993; Slavin, 1996).

Along with the development of information and communications technology, the use of computers and the Internet has started to play an increasingly important role in education. Computer supported collaborative learning has become an innovation to improve teaching and learning (Järvelä, Hakkarainen, Lipponen & Lehtinen, 2000). Previous research results generally show that learners are more willing to collaborate and are more capable of helping one another to achieve better results if they are allowed to engage in an online collaborative learning environment (Lee & Chen, 2000; Su, Chen, Chen & Tsai, 2000).

3. Why We Need Online Collaboration in the ESL Writing Context

3.1 Promoting Active Learning

Collaboration may help to create new relationships in ESL writing classrooms. Unlike traditional classrooms where learners may be viewed as only the receivers of knowledge, learners can now have more control over their learning. Learner control means that the learner can take control of what, when and how he/she learns. This is a very easily perceived benefit of online learning. The benefits of learner control include an increased sense of personal responsibility for learning and a realization of individual differences, according to Ewing & Miller (2002).

3.2 Improving Writing Skills

The rationale for using computers in ESL writing lessons is that good writing can be made possible by creating a sense of audience/community in writing, attaching importance to feedback and revision, reducing stress of writing and enhancing mutual help. It has been found that these aspects can be realized more easily via the use of technology because technology promotes collaboration and expands the learners' writing community, which in turn helps to make learners "more aware of the importance of audience in their writing, and gain more confidence as writers" (Cantrell, 2003). These aspects of the writing process are discussed in detail in the following sections.

3.2.1 Cultivating a Sense of Audience

In contrast to traditional ESL writing rooms where writing may be read/evaluated by the instructor only, the learners in an online writing classroom not only write for instructors, but also for peers and other people (if published). Learners can then experience real responses. Rather than writing for an unreal reader, they can now engage in real communication. The presence of potential online readers gives the learners a sense of audience in the writing process. They will realize the importance of taking into consideration the interests, needs and language level of their readers in the writing process. An environment that allows collaboration can therefore enhance the sense of audience among learners in the writing process.

3.2.2 Enhancing the Importance of Feedback and Revision

Having feedback is important to learners as it helps to "teach skills that help learners improve their writing proficiency" and produce written texts with fewer errors and more clarity (Williams, 2003). This can enhance learning and enable learners to improve their linguistic knowledge and understand more about the skills of writing as a result of receiving feedback; however, the common way for learners to get feedback seem to be from their teachers in the traditional writing classrooms. In fact, both recent research and practice have supported the use of peer feedback in ESL writing classes (Rollinson, 2005). Even a piece of good writing requires revision, which means that all learners need to rewrite their work (Chenoweth, 1987), a process in which the comments of others can be especially useful. Peer response can enhance the sense of/the need for revision and lead to better quality of work (Mendonça & Johnson, 1994: p. 765).

3.2.3 Reducing Stress of Writing and Promoting Mutual Help

With the creation of a writing community in the online ESL classroom, learning may become more learner-centered and egalitarian, thus turning out to be less intimidating and more accessible. As a result, peers may be more inclined to work together in accomplishing tasks. Writing is especially appropriate in peer work because according to Morris (2001), learners "work more with each other in developing a shared product rather than listening as a group to the teacher or performing independently". And as writers, individuals may become less stressed as their peers provide assistance to them, thus reducing their sense of individual exposure. The writing community can also help to cultivate the sense of interdependence, which encourages learners to engage in the community and help one another in the writing and revising process.

3.3 Developing Higher Order Thinking Skills

Higher order thinking is a way to approach problem solving and to think critically (Bloom, 1956**)**. The ability to think critically is essential if individuals are to live, work, and function effectively in our current and changing society.

Research has shown that technology applications can support higher-order thinking by engaging students in authentic, complex tasks within collaborative learning contexts" (Valdez, 2005). Different kinds of technology may help to develop different kinds of higher-ordering skills. Email and all sorts of discussion forums promote reading, writing, criticizing and problem-solving skills; Internet searching promotes learners' reading, researching, exploring, inventing and thinking skills; word-processing promotes writing, organization, analyzing and inventing skills.

3.4 Enhancing Interactivity

Online collaborative writing provides an opportunity for the exchange of ideas and views. Writing is an information-sharing process by means of which learners can shape their opinions based on the comments of others. Moreover, since learners have to give comments on others' work, the more responses they make, the more they will be aware of the importance of the use of language in writing, as online communication relies almost entirely on a written format. The use of technology could encourage discussion about writing since computer communication can be done either synchronously or asynchronously. These modes allow learners to have more chances to engage in discussing others' work and helping one another to improve their work. Their writing becomes a response to discussion that will stimulate further discussion. The creation of "responsive and active learning environments" (Cicognani, 2000; Hannafin & Hill, 2002, p.77) leads to an improvement of learning effectiveness of this group of students since online collaboration pedagogy utilizes peer help in constructing knowledge (Xun, Yamashiro & Lee, 2000; Andrewartha & Wilmot, 2001).

4. Research Review of the Use of Online Collaboration in ESL Writing

4.1 Studies on the Benefits of Online Collaboration

Numerous studies have been carried out in an attempt to discover whether students with online collaboration opportunities learned better than students with traditional methods in ESL writing lessons. The use of online collaboration has focused largely on bringing about changes in student writers' attitudes and on writing resulting from the use of information technology tools, such as email. Most of these studies have documented a number of favorable impacts on the use of online collaboration in the ESL writing context, including increased audience awareness, motivation and willingness to make revision.

For instance, Caroline Ho's 2000 study, "Developing Intercultural Awareness and Writing Skills through Email Exchange", examined the use of online collaboration in a writing project between primary level pupils from two schools, one in Singapore and one in Birmingham (UK). Her study shows that the use of online collaboration has helped to "develop pupil's confidence, language skills, creativity and sense of awareness of intercultural concerns". Moreover, students are found to be more motivated and positive towards writing.

Another study conducted by Jor (2000) with a group of Hong Kong university students was used to examine the effectiveness of online collaboration in developing students' English proficiency, competence and confidence. The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative methods in measuring the course effectiveness, and the results showed that there was a modest increase in the writing scores of the students after they had participated in the course. In addition, the students generally welcomed the use of collaboration and the increase of interactivity in the writing process.

Roseanne Greenfield, in her 2003 article "Collaborative E-mail Exchange for Teaching Secondary ESL: A Case Study in Hong Kong", points out that the majority of the participants in her study "made significant progress in writing, thinking and speaking" through the exchange. Both the qualitative and quantitative data showed students' positive responses towards the use of collaborative writing model and the possibility of using collaborative exchanges in enhancing second language learning.

Esnawy (2004) used both in-class and online instruction modes in a writing course for graduate students in an academic writing class at the American University in Cairo. The student comments on the use of email for submitting their essays and communicating with the teacher and other students were found to be very positive, and the researcher pointed out that combining in-class and online instruction was beneficial for the students as there was more interaction both in-class and out of class, thus enhancing students' learning experience.

4.2 Studies on Peer Feedback and Response

A second area of research has explored the usefulness and patterns of peer feedback and response in the ESL writing context, both within a class and between students in different classes. Although most of the research shows that students enjoyed the process of interaction, some of them did not find peer feedback and response useful or helpful (Tsui & Ng, 2000; Berkow, 2001; Ferris, 2003).

In assessing students' responses in the use of both online and face-to-face responses, DiGiovanni & Nagaswami (2001) conducted a study in two pre-college ESL writing classes at a Community College in Philadelphia. The results of the study showed that students found the peer review process useful. They welcomed the use of both face-to-face and online peer review, and the researchers agreed that frequent online interaction could help students become more critical and effective negotiators. The researchers also found that “computer conversations are a form of hybrid communication that allows students to respond spontaneously, yet offers them the opportunity to reflect on their ideas, rehearse their responses, and respond at their own pace” (p. 269).

In a similar vein, Tuzi (2004) studied the use of peer comments as an aid to revision in writing among 20 ESL learners in a college in Pennsylvania. The results showed that students preferred face-to-face feedback to online feedback, though they found that online feedback was useful in revision. In addition, Tuzi found that the training students received before the writing process was useful in enabling them to be more effective responders and to be more aware of some of the areas of concern in writing and giving feedback.

5. Design of the Study

5.1 Setting

The study was conducted with a class of 36 higher diploma (intermediate level) students (28 females, 8 males) from a community college in Hong Kong in the second semester of 2004-2005. The participants were registered for the business English module. The instructor was the researcher of this study and an experienced teacher who taught students of the same level was invited to be the observer. The study attempted to collect students’ feelings and attitudes towards the use of online collaboration in the ESL writing lessons, so there was no inclusion of a control group.

The students and the instructor met in their regular face-to-face English lessons every week for three hours, in which they were taught the regular curriculum of the College (Business English). However, the writing module was changed into a hybrid format for this study for fourteen weeks: a mixture of classroom teaching and web-based activities. The participants were divided into groups of four to six according to their own choice.

5.2 Tasks

There were three writing tasks in total for the students throughout the semester. Face-to-face lessons on the basics of the writing genres of the tasks, related language items and criteria for good writing were given prior to the start of the online writing process, with the use of an email system provided by the students’ course book “Business Communication” (Krizan, Merrier & Jones, 2005).

5.2.1 Writing a Short Report

The design of Task 1 was to familiarize students with the operation of the online writing process used in this study. A simulated task related to the writing of short reports for a particular person of a group was given. The students were asked to finish a short and informal report individually for the Marketing and Managing Manager of their college, summarizing the views of higher diploma students (who were their schoolmates) on the effectiveness of the learning facilities and environment in the community college. To make the writing task authentic, the students had to collect real data by carrying out a small survey interviewing at least ten students of the College on their views on the topic before compiling their report. The students were then required to send their first draft to at least two of their group members for comments (they were mostly in groups of five). All email messages had to be copied to the instructor, so that she could monitor the comments students made and their progress. The final output was a result of the collaborative work of the student writer and the comments of his/her peers.

5.2.2 Writing Minutes

The purpose of Task 2 was to familiarize students with the concept of the use of online collaboration and to provide them an opportunity to apply the principles and skills acquired in the previous task. The writing approach taken for this task was therefore truly collaborative as students worked together to complete a writing task.

In this task, students were asked to work in their groups and plan for a face-to-face meeting to discuss the issues relating to the organization of the opening ceremony for the Third International Student Conference which would be held in Hong Kong. They had to take the roles of the members of the organizing committee of the conference who were representing different sectors, like students or the government. They had to conduct the meeting (for about 20 minutes) in front of the instructor and one observer group consisting of four to six of their classmates (chosen randomly from the class). The observer group needed to take notes of the meeting they attended. After the meeting, each member had to submit the main points they noted down to their group members by email. Each of them had to comment on the points given by others. Then the leader allocated each member the responsibility for writing up a draft for part of the minutes in form of a paragraph, which they had to send to their group for comments. Based on the comments of group members, the writer of the particular sections could make amendments, and the final drafts were then forwarded to the leader for compilation. The final work was sent to members for comment once again, before being submitted to the instructor. Finally the instructor gave comments and a grade.

5.2.3 Writing a Long Report

After the students had established a familiarity with the online learning process from the first two tasks, Task 3 provided an opportunity to consolidate their skills in the use of online collaboration in ESL writing. In Task 3, the students were asked to produce a formal report for the government of Hong Kong in the capacity of a consultancy group on the views of the public relating to the "Concept Plan of Lantau", a development plan proposed by the government for Lantau Island (an outlying island of Hong Kong). Each group had to interview at least 30 Hong Kong citizens or tourists. The report was also more complete in its format since the students had to include an abstract and sections dealing with implications and conclusions.

5.3 Data Collection

Taking into account the time and financial resources available, survey questionnaires were used in eliciting data regarding the research objective. In addition, in order to capture the various perceptions that may exist among students in the use of online collaboration in writing classes and to verify the responses from the questionnaires, a mixture of qualitative data collection techniques was used in the study: students' reflective summaries, interview scripts, observer notes, students' written work and online responses. The students' post-course questionnaire survey findings, interview scripts and students' reflective summaries were used mainly to collect data that tell if online collaboration helped improve their writing and peer help was beneficial to their writing process. To assure the trustworthiness of the findings, a triangulation of various forms of data (instructor's reflective summaries and observer notes) were employed to allow cross-checking of data and interpretations from different sources and explore ways of better structuring the online writing lessons. A further way to promote trustworthiness was to use the participants' written work and peer responses to verify the data and check if the interpretations are reasonable.

5.4 Data Analysis

For the purpose of this study, the data originating from the above sources were collected at different stages. As a first step, the responses to the post-course questionnaire (Appendix) were organised and transformed into percentages and mean scores. The next step was transcribing the interview tape. Then the interview transcript, the observer report, the reflective summaries from students and the instructor were read so as to develop ideas about categories and relationships relevant to the research questions. The final step was to analyse the written work of student writers by comparing the drafts and the revisions and evaluate peer feedback by identifying the changes student writers made based on peer feedback.

6. Discussion of Findings

6.1 Introduction

Among the 34 respondents (two of the participants were absent on the day of evaluation), the male and female distribution was 25% male, 75% female. Since the difference between data obtained from the male and female respondents is insignificant, they are reported as a single group. For easy reference, the data from these sources are identified by a code representing the sources (Q=questionnaire, I=interview; R=reflective summaries and E=e-feedback). The task number is also given (T1, T2, T3) when the data are taken from reflective summaries or e-feedback. As for data from interview scripts and the questionnaire, no task number is given since students' comments for the three tasks in these sources were mixed together. When the data from an individual student are used, they are reproduced in the participants' own unedited words with an identifying number (S1, S2, etc.). Thus R-T3-S6 indicates data obtained from Student 6 in relation to Task 3 in the reflective summaries. In addition to these data sources, observations of the instructor cum researcher were embedded in the discussions of the research questions.

6.2 The Usefulness 0f Online Collaboration in the ESL Writing Process

The positive effects of using online collaboration in ESL writing lessons can be found in the following aspects:

- increase in motivation
- enhancement of sense of audience
- promotion of importance of revision
- reduction of stress in writing
- cultivation of positive attitudes towards writing

6.2.1 Increase in Motivation

Firstly, the data from the post-course questionnaire showed that online collaboration could help motivate students to learn from their peers; however, the students did not perceive that online collaboration was very helpful in motivating their interest in writing, especially when they had to deal with a task that required a longer period of time to finish or more complicated procedures. This is reflected in the students' comments from the reflective summaries they made after finishing each writing task. Significant differences in their motivation to learn could be found in the responses of some of the students made for Task 1 (Short report) and Task 3 (Long Report).

Though the genre of writing was the same, Task 3 was comparatively longer and more complicated; thus students were expected to spend more time on it and were involved in more procedures, for instance, they had to make a questionnaire, go out to carry out interviews and conduct analysis. In addition, in the process of completing Task 3, students had to collaborate with others by contributing to all parts of the report, commenting on others' work and making revisions based on peer feedback.

Task 1 was shorter and simpler as students were required to complete a very short questionnaire, conduct an interview with 10 people, complete a 500-600 word report on the own, send it to other group members for comments and then revise it based on peer responses.

The responses given by three students in the reflective summaries for Task 1 contrast markedly with those they gave for Task 3. This can be illustrated by the comments some of the students made for the two tasks: (See Table 1)

The comments they made coincide with the findings from the post-course questionnaire that the respondents regarded online collaboration more helpful in encouraging learning from peers than to writing.

6.2.2 Enhancement of Sense of Audience

As shown by the findings of the questionnaire, another benefit of online collaboration on writing is that students generally become more aware of the importance of audience awareness after engaging in the course. The percentage may not be high enough to prove that there was a significant change among the students; however, it can be sufficient to prove that there was a change of attitudes among students.

In the present study, students were provided with an environment where they could get a larger and more varied audience to read their work and they knew that this audience would provide feedback on how their work could be improved. In addition, they could become the audience for their peers. This kind of environment has gradually cultivated a sense of audience among students in their writing process, which they found beneficial. According to Bloch (2004), "the internet allowed these writers to receive comments from a real audience with a real purpose but without the artificial constraints of a face-to-face classroom……" As one of the students reported in the reflective summary:

As audiences are my classmates, which are at the same level as mine. Therefore comments given by them will be useful in helping me to improve my writing skills. (R-T1-S16)

The cultivation of sense of audience among students in their collaborative writing process was regarded by the peer observer of this study as a feature of the pedagogy of the online writing course, as she said in her report:

Through the process of collaborative evaluation and writing, students can become more aware of a sense of audience.

Nevertheless, there were students who still regarded the teacher as the real audience that could give grades and marks (as revealed in the interview). It is probably due to the authoritarian role of the teacher that persists in Chinese classrooms. This coincides with the finding of Anderson (2002), who pointed out that teacher feedback to second language writers is often regarded as the most important.

6.2.3 Promotion of Importance of Revision

The positive response students made to the question that asked if online collaboration could help them be aware of the importance of revision in the writing process demonstrates that most of them (mean: 3.69) realized the need to revise within the writing process and looked upon this practice as a good way of improving their writing. The interview and the reflective summaries show that some students found that revision was useful to the improvement of their writing and that they liked doing it. One of the students put the following in her reflective summary:

As I need to give out my first and second draft for comments, this gives me a chance to make amendments on my work before giving out the final draft. Therefore I prefer this learning format to the traditional one. (R-T1-S16)

Another student in the interview also regarded revising as helpful to improve her writing skills. The reason was:

We got more chances to revise our work as we need to finish many drafts and make changes according to others' comments. (I-S6)

As students tend to make revisions in their work in the writing process, they may take more responsibility for their own learning, thus allowing them to be more independent of the teacher inside and outside of the classroom. This training process may widen the horizon of the students and empower them to be more autonomous in their future learning, as illustrated in the report of the peer observer of this study:

Besides increasing their sense of audience, online collaboration has enabled students to be more responsible writers.

6.2.4 Reduction of Stress in Writing

It was observed that in this e-learning environment where students could take responsibility for their own learning and benefit from a supportive network with collaboration and co-operation provided, most of the students (m=3.69) found that they became less stressed in their writing process.

With the emergence of a learning community created by online collaboration in this study, students could learn from one another, share their ideas and work together towards common goals. There was collaboration and communication, not competition and isolation anymore. The comments of students in the questionnaire indicate that they liked the online learning mode more than the traditional one since they found it "more interesting" and could get the "comments from peers" in the process. This view is consistent with the findings of Mabrito and Self, as reported by Tannacito (2001), who point out that online learning platform could help provide a "non-threatening" and "reduced-risk" environment for student writers.

6.2.5 Cultivation of Positive Attitudes towards Writing

When the students were asked in the questionnaire, most of them stated that they enjoyed the online writing lessons more than traditional ones and that they liked doing the writing tasks online. This finding corresponds with the analysis in the previous section. In addition to the benefits of being more interesting and getting comments from peers, the majority of students appreciated the "convenience" given by the online learning mode. As one of the students commented in their reflective summaries:

Submitting works online is very convenient, and I can get the responses from group mates immediately. Therefore I think this format of learning is very efficient and can save time. (R-T1-S16)

Other reasons given by the students in support of the use of the online learning mode included the flexibility allowed for students in the writing process. According to the comments from the interview, the flexibility could be found in the time given for completing the tasks and the technical help available for them to complete their work. As one of the students in the interview reported:

Online writing is better as in the traditional lessons we have to finish the tasks within a short time. We are constrained by time and the quality of writing will be affected. (I-S3)

It is, however, noteworthy that some of the students did not think that their writing skills had been improved using the online writing course or that they had learnt to be an effective writer in this course. This may largely due to the lack of timely responses from their peers and quality of comments they received in their group, as observed by one student in the interview:

[Online collaboration is] not very useful in helping us to improve the writing skills. It would be more useful if we could work with someone who was of higher standard…(I-S1)

As pointed out by the peer observer of the study in her report, "students sometimes experience difficulty deciding on the validity or relevance of peer comments", thus reducing their confidence on the effectiveness of online collaboration in improving their writing skills or helping them to be effective writers. It is true that not many peers could produce useful comments as this was the first time that they tried online collaborative writing tasks, but as Rollinson (2005) states, "by giving students practice in becoming critical readers, we are at the same time helping them towards becoming more self-reliant writers, who are self-critical and who have the skills to self-edit and revise their writing" (p. 29).

6.3 The Usefulness of Peer Help in the ESL Online Writing Process

In confirmation of the results of the previous sections on the usefulness of using peer help, the findings of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of students' revisions and e-feedback in the writing process are further discussed here.

6.3.1 Changes on Revisions Based on E-feedback

Most of the changes students made on their drafts based on peer feedback were on making meanings clearer and adding new information. For instance:

Making meanings clearer

"it would be better if you can include the name of the person who suggest the ideas……" (E-T2-S1)

Adding new information

" If you can point out what is their final decision may be better." (E-T2-S1)

In addition, it seems that e-feedback had a greater impact on student writers' revisions in Task 1 (n: 17) than in Tasks 2 (n: 3) and 3 (n: 0). This may probably due to the differences in the nature and writing process of the tasks. Since Task 1 was an individual task and the operation process was comparatively simpler than the other group writing tasks, students might find it easier to give comments to their peers and to act on those they received in the group writing tasks. Another interesting observation is that e-feedback was given primarily on the initial drafts and the subsequent drafts received fewer comments. This could be due to the misconception of students that peer comments were more useful for the first drafts or the limitation of time in the middle and later stages of the collaborative writing process in Tasks 2 and 3. With respect to the message components of peers, despite the fact that more than 50% of the response components written by peers were found unhelpful to the improvement of the drafts (as 43% consisted of praise and 11.5% of useless comments), the findings did show that the student writers had given more comments on the macro level problems, such as the improvement of content or the development of ideas (as 24.9% and 15.8% were respectively about advice or making changes to the content or ideas and criticism on the content and ideas of the drafts), rather than on the micro level problem like the change of grammar). Examples of the message components on advice or suggestions and criticism are as follows:

Advice or suggestions

"It is more clearly to specify the result by using the percentage." (E-T1-S7)

Criticism

"you forgot to add your name and position at the end of the report." (E-T1-S4)

The above finding did show that the training student writers received on giving comments before the commencement of the writing tasks had some influence on them though it was unable to prove that the students had been trained to give quality feedback, since they still produced a lot of unhelpful comments.

6.3.2 Changes on Revisions Based on Members' Drafts

In Tasks 2 and 3, student writers had to work collaboratively as each one was responsible for writing a particular section. Hence, they needed to make amendments to their drafts based on the information of members' drafts besides making changes to their own drafts based on peer feedback. They had to select useful pieces of information from members' drafts since some of it might be either incorrect or not necessary. The results of quantitative analysis of student revisions based on the information of members' drafts show that most of the students (especially in Task 3) made very little or no change to their drafts after reading others' work. This may be due to the fact that they did not trust their peer work or had no time to refer or select the useful materials form their peers' work. However, it is interesting to note that the revisions that most of the students made based on the information of peers' drafts were on adding new information (73%). For instance, in Task 3, one of the student writers added in the information of the interviewees after getting the relevant information from her group member. Most of the new additions to the work were found suitable and helpful in the improvement of the work by giving more detailed information.

6.3.3 Usefulness of Peer Help on Student Writers' Writing Process

Though we could find some negative comments expressed by the students on the use of online collaboration, particularly peer help, as mentioned in the previous section, most of the students' reflective summaries and responses from the questionnaire and interview shared one common feature: they spoke highly of peer help. This is also reflected by one student in the reflective summary:

I can get the comment of my writing exercises from my group mates. After I have received the comment, I can improve my work before I send to the tutor. Getting the comment from my group mates can let me know more ideas of my work also. (R-T1-S36)

However, an interesting finding was that the responses students gave to three similar statements regarding peer feedback or comments in the questionnaire was somewhat different: (See Table 2)

Though students rated highly the usefulness of peer responses to their correction of work and improvement of writing skills, the findings suggest that some of the respondents became uncertain about the effectiveness of peer feedback/comments when they were asked to make the evaluation again. This may reflect the fact that some of the respondents were still unsure about the effectiveness of peer responses, and this may explain why 15% of them switched to "neutral/certain" when asked for their opinions again (#C). Their uncertainty or ambiguity may stem from their "difficulties deciding on the validity or relevance of peer comments" as pointed by the peer observer of this study. On one hand, they seemed to have received a lot of comments from peers; on the other hand, they were not sure about their validity, so they tended not to adopt them for use in their work. Comment of students from the interview and reflective summaries can best explain this phenomenon:

I usually got positive comments-the good ones-not really the helpful ones. (I-S3)

I'm not sure whether what I 'learnt' from group mate is correct or not. I find no direction in learning from others' work. (R-T1-S23)

Despite the contradictory comments regarding the effectiveness of peer responses shown above, the results of the questionnaire survey appear to support the view that students in general had favorable perceptions of peer help. It seems that they enjoyed the interaction between them and peers during the writing process and this helped create a positive attitude towards writing (Rizk, 2001). As Crank (2002) states, "in the process of guiding them to online peer response, we activate their learning, calling upon them to demonstrate and trust their innate and their recently acquired standards for good writing". We may therefore conclude that peer help is beneficial in the writing process since it generated more interaction between peers, thus enabling the development of positive attitudes towards writing.

6.4 Limitations of the Online ESL Writing Course

On the whole, most of the students in this study found the course design helpful and enjoyed the use of online collaboration and peer help in their writing lessons; however, there are some areas in which the use of online collaboration and peer help are found not very effective, according to the comments of students from the interview, questionnaires and reflective summaries.

6.4.1 Task Setting

An interesting result of the study is the comparatively low ratings for Task 3 in terms of the time allowed for completion and the appropriateness to their level. This might suggest that a more careful re-design of the task. In addition, the low ratings to the statements that asked if the students felt comfortable taking part in the group writing tasks and if it was easier to discuss tasks online than face-to-face might be related to the dissatisfaction of some of the students with Task 3.

Moreover, it was found that students favored a task that was simple in its design. As reflected from the reflective summaries, Task 1 (short report) received more positive comments than Tasks 2-3 (minutes and long report) generally. Since Task 1 required students only to finish the short report on their own and then revise their work once based on the comments of peers, it was comparatively simpler than Tasks 2-3 in which students were required to produce more drafts and make more comments. Coupled with the tight work schedule and the uncooperative attitudes of peers, a student voiced his/her preference for Task 1 in the interview:

I like the way we did the 'Short Report' since I didn't need to co-operate with others to finish my work and I could get their comments after I finished my work. I don't like the way we did the 'Minutes' and the 'Long Report' as one member failed to submit the work on time, the whole group would be affected. (I-S2)

6.4.2 Technological Use

When evaluating the technological component of the online writing course (the use of email system of the WebCT), some of the students praised the use of email for submitting their essays and communicating with each other. As one of the students reported in the interview:

The most useful aspect to me is the email system because it is efficient, which is much better than the Yahoo. It is quick to upload the document. (I-S5)

However, there were also students who criticized in the interview on the email system provided by the WebCT:

It was troublesome to select the names of group members out from the long list given. (I-S5)

The sending or receiving time shown in the messages is not about the local time, it is about the US time. (I-S2)

As revealed above, the shortcoming of the email system of the WebCT is that students could not create a group distribution list that they could use for dispatch. Every time when students sent their work to their group members, they needed to select the names out from the long list that included the names of the students from the six English classes the instructor taught. This procedure had to be repeated when students sent out their work for comments or compilation.

6.4.3 Group Dynamic

A major goal of the online writing course was to provide students with the opportunities to construct knowledge when working together in groups. In this study, students were allowed to form their own groupings with the group size set at 4-6. The result was that seven mixed-ability groups of four to six were formed to work on the three writing tasks collaboratively. It is, however, interesting to note that some high-ability students reflected in the reflective summaries and interview that they thought their peers were not very helpful in assisting them in improving or completing their work. They found that the comments and ideas of their peers were either "not correct" or "not useful". They even worried that their performance would be undermined by their group members since they would receive the same grade or marks, as mentioned in one of their reflective summaries:

… if the comments of the group members are not correct, it will affect the overall grade of an individual's work. (R-T1-S14)

The lack of useful peer feedback from group members may account for some students' negative feelings towards the use of online collaboration and peer help in the writing lessons.

6.4.4 Peer Help

An important feature examined in the previous section was the usefulness of peer help in the online writing process. As indicated in the findings, the value of peers lies in their supportive function rather than as critical readers of each other's texts. As one student mentioned the following in the reflective summary when asked about the most useful aspect of the course:

I would like to say that it is really happy to work with my group members. (R-T3-S35)

The major problem of peer help identified by students is that the peer feedback was of limited use. The students of the study (particularly the higher ability ones) regarded their peers as failing to make useful comments/ideas on their work. For example, two students commented in the interview:

As some of the group mates pointed out, even they themselves were not sure about the reliability of their comments when they sent out to me. (I-S1)

Some of the comments are very general, … not very helpful for improving the work … (I-S4)

In addition, although the tasks were designed to ensure that there was equality of participation in the sense that all students had an equal chance of participating in the discussion in their groups, the findings show that some of them did not actively join the activities. Nor did they observe the deadline for submitting comments or their contributions to the work. This not only affected the progress of the whole group, it also defeated the objective of the course in which all of the students were expected to collaborate and contribute ideas to help one another. This phenomenon was recorded by a student in the reflective summary:

But the progress may be out of control if one of the member didn't co-operate. As a result, I can't complete the task---a bit stressed as I did hard in my group's task. (R-T2-S23)

6.4.5 Teacher's Role

The course design was intended to let the instructor take a less prominent role during the discussion among students. It was hoped that more space could then be created for students' voices by doing so. Within this context, the students could feel that their discussion was of value and that they could share ideas and create meanings collaboratively.

However, the teacher-student relationship shown in the study seems to be indicative of Confucianism which values the teacher as the sage and the repository of knowledge. It is not surprising to find that only 59.4% of the respondents (mean=3.69) from the post-course questionnaire survey considered the support from the instructor was sufficient. The following direct quotes from students' post-course questionnaire are representative of the general responses when they were asked about the improvements for the course:

The teacher should be more interactive with students. (Q-S8)

The teachers give comments to our works. (Q-S10)

Lecturer can give comment before finalize the whole report. (Q-S24)

Miss can give comments to us before I send the final draft. (Q-S34)

It is obvious that the participants in this study felt a sense of uncertainty without the instructor's comments on their work as there is a tendency among ESL students in Hong Kong to wait for the teacher for guidelines or comments on their work. The evaluation shows that they appear not to trust their peers' comments and want more input from the teacher. This was also pointed out by the peer observer of the study:

Tutor gives comments and grades students at the final stage. This approach can train students to think independently and be more critical when evaluating peer comments. However, the overall quality of interaction in the course might be compromised.

7. Implications and recommendations

The current study shows how students engaged in an online writing environment reacted differently from the way expected in a traditional one. Since it was the first time for them and the instructor to participate in the online learning and teaching mode, the weaknesses displayed were unavoidable. Therefore, other researchers or educators need to take into consideration the limitations identified in the study if they would like to have an effective implementation of the online collaborative learning in their future ESL writing lessons.

Firstly, more training and practices on how to give and receive the most useful comments needs to be provided prior to the start of the writing tasks. During the current study, it is found that some of the students were passive and unwilling to give their comments, and did not provide responses at the required time. Even worst, the study shows that some of them did not know how to give comments though they had been given guidelines or briefings before the start of the tasks. In that case, their group members had to suffer as they could not have the useful comments of their peers for improving or collating their work. This has greatly undermined the effectiveness of online collaboration.

In improving the communicative responsibility of students, students should be made more aware of the issue of time management. Also, even if they gave comments, they tended to give some very general ones or just focus on the aspect of grammar. This may be due to the lack of former experience in doing the writing tasks in the online mode. It is, therefore, proposed that a more complete and thorough training program aiming at equipping the students with the skills of giving effective comments be given prior to the implementation of the course. As the peer observer of the study suggested in her report, "students can then learn what to look for when reviewing others' drafts and how they can make their comments more concrete". Training students can help them be more effective responders and highlight the areas that they need to be concerned when writing and responding.

Secondly, the assistance of the instructor should be enhanced in the writing process of students as students commented in the questionnaire, interview and reflective summaries showed that some of the students felt that there should be more of teacher's assistance in the writing process. The assistance here means the feedback to their work. This is a reflection of the students' long-held traditional belief of the role of teacher as the only repository of knowledge. It is important that the concern of the students in this aspect be addressed in order to enhance the effectiveness of online collaboration. This is agreed by the peer observer of the study who suggested in her report that "the tutor can consider providing feedback to students at an earlier stage before their final submission". Nevertheless, the instructor should remember that the amount of his/her intervention in the group learning process should be minimized.

Thirdly, in the process of planning, the course developer should try to create writing tasks that require simpler procedures and shorter length. The result of the study shows that some students were confused by the complexity of Task 3 (long report) and the substantial workload attached to the task. In fact as the instructor of the course, I admit that the writing required in Task 3 was long and repetitive. Students had to complete and comment on many drafts before finalizing their work. This might generate the negative feeling towards the online learning mode and account for their dissatisfaction over the course.

Moreover, inter- and intra-group co-operation should be strengthened. In the present study, the online writing environment provided a new avenue for students to receive feedback from peers; however, for the sake of management, students could only receive comments from their group members. As the groups were of mixed abilities here, some of the high-ability students commented that their group mates could not give them useful comments for improving their work. This may account for the low ratings they gave for the usefulness of peer help and the negative comments they made for the effectiveness of online collaboration. In the interview, a student even suggested 'putting the students of high ability in one group and the poor ones can be mixed with average ones'. However, this practice may generate the inferior feelings of the weaker students in the class and they may not benefit much if they only work with those of similar level. A possible way of tackling this problem is to incorporate inter-group co-operation in the writing process, so that students can receive input from other people other than their own group members. This corresponds with the suggestions made by the peer observer of the study:

A possible incentive for students to collaborate more online is to allow inter-group interactions and comments.

One area for further investigation is how to foster meaningful exchanges among groups of mixed English abilities.

In addition to the provision of opportunities for students to have an expanded audience, it is also important to strengthen intra-group co-operation. The study shows that the co-operation varied among groups. Some of them enjoyed their co-operation a lot while others did not. As reflected in the interview and reflective summaries, some of the students pointed out that they got irresponsible members who did not observe the deadlines or submit their work. To ensure that there is a smooth running of the system and that everyone in the group works and contributes, it is suggested that a more complete penalty and reward system should be introduced. This is also proposed by the peer observer in her report:

In relation to the problem of students not adhering to deadlines, a penalty can be imposed on those who submitted their work.

Furthermore, the major technological component of the course – email - should be improved. The user-friendliness of the technology employed in an online course can be a crucial factor contributing to students' positive attitudes towards the effectiveness of the course. In the interview and reflective summaries, some of the students expressed their dissatisfaction over the use of the email system of the WebCT platform chosen for this online writing course, and this could be a limiting factor in their interaction. It is thus suggested that the existing email system be able to:

- generate group distribution lists so as to provide ease of use for senders
- show the correct sending and receiving time of messages (i.e. the local time, not the US time, as at present)
- provide sorting functions so that messages can be sorted according to senders, receiving time or subjects

8. Conclusion

As the study draws its data from only a small group of learners, it does not claim much generalizability. The goal of the investigation reported here is to describe the process, results and participants' feelings about this particular online writing course. The results of this report attempt only to stimulate thinking by researchers into how a more appropriate application of online writing courses might be developed for the tertiary levels of Hong Kong.

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Table 1

Student	Comments	
	Task 1(Short report)	Task 3 (Long report)
R-S17	Comments from them [peers] are useful for me to improve my work and know more about what mistakes I have made. I have learnt a lot on this assignment with the help of my members.	I would rather prefer the traditional method for doing this report because it is not troublesome and each of us can concentrate on our responsible part.
R-S30	In general, the online English lessons is quite good and useful to me…the online learning is interesting because we can do tasks online, convenient to me, save time.	… the process of writing long report on WebCT is complex because the steps are so many.

Table 2

Comments	Strongly agree +agree	Neutral/ uncertain	Strongly disagree +disagree	Mean scores	SD
#A. Peer responses are useful for correcting my work.	71.9%	25%	3.1%	3.84	0.71
#B. Feedback from peers on my work is useful to the improvement of my writing skills.	71.9%	25%	3.1%	4.03	0.85
#C. I found the comments of other members useful.	50%	40.6%	9.4%	3.56	0.86

Appendix

Summary of responses to the post-course questionnaire survey

Total responses: 34 (2 students were absent on the day of evaluation)

A. Results in percentages

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
General Issues					
1. I was given a good introduction on the writing process before starting tasks.	0.0	6.3	18.8	59.4	15.6
2. I understood clearly the requirements of the tasks before starting the task.	0.0	0.0	34.4	40.6	25.0
3. I was able to use the email system (provided by the WebCT platform) effectively for completing the tasks.	3.1	0.0	15.6	34.4	46.9
4. The support with this online course was sufficient.	0.0	0.0	40.6	50.0	9.4
5. The design of Task 1 (short report) familiarized me with the operation of the online writing process.	0.0	3.1	25.0	56.3	15.6
6. The design of Task 2 (minutes) familiarized me with the concept of online collaboration.	0.0	0.0	40.6	53.1	6.3
7. The design of Task 3 (long report) consolidated my skills in the use of online collaboration in English writing.	0.0	6.3	34.4	50.0	9.4
8. The design of the course content was useful to my learning.	0.0	3.1	34.4	43.8	18.8
9. The use of the email system was helpful to my interaction with my classmates.	0.0	6.3	21.9	50.0	21.9
10. Clear timelines and due dates were given.	0.0	3.1	28.1	25.0	43.8
11. It was good that we could choose our groupings.	0.0	6.3	28.1	37.5	28.1
Tasks					
12. Task 1 was suitable to our level.	0.0	0.0	18.8	46.9	34.4
13. Task 2 was suitable to our level.	0.0	3.1	15.6	46.9	34.4
14. Task 3 was suitable to our level.	0.0	3.1	34.4	37.5	25.0
15. I had sufficient time to finish task 1.	0.0	3.1	28.1	50.0	18.8
16. I had sufficient time to finish task 2.	0.0	3.1	28.1	50.0	18.8
17. I had sufficient time to finish task 3.	0.0	21.9	46.9	21.9	9.4
18. Having the online features made completing the tasks easier.	0.0	6.3	40.6	28.1	25.0
Online collaboration and peer help					
19. Peer-to peer learning was highly encouraged by the online learning mode.	0.0	0.0	34.4	65.6	0.0
20. I worked well with my group mates.	0.0	0.0	40.6	40.6	18.8
21. Collaboration was built in through the tasks	0.0	0.0	31.3	56.3	12.5
22. Collaboration was built in through the use of email.	0.0	0.0	34.4	65.6	0.0
23. Online collaboration could help me be more aware the sense of audience in the writing process.	0.0	0.0	46.9	50.0	3.1
24. Online collaboration could help me be more aware of the importance of revision in the writing process.	0.0	3.1	31.3	59.4	6.3

25. Online collaboration motivates my interest in writing.	0.0	9.4	43.8	40.6	6.3
26. Online collaboration could reduce my stress of writing.	0.0	9.4	21.9	59.4	9.4
27. Peer responses were useful for correcting my work.	0.0	3.1	25.0	56.3	15.6
Percentage %	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
28. Feedback from peers on my work was useful to the improvement of my writing skills.	0.0	3.1	25.0	37.5	34.4
29. I felt comfortable discussing the task with my group mates.	0.0	6.3	34.4	43.8	15.6
30. I found my interaction with my peers is valuable.	0.0	3.1	37.5	40.6	18.8
31. I could give useful comments to other members on their work.	3.1	9.4	34.4	37.5	15.6
32. I found the comments of other members useful.	0.0	9.4	40.6	34.4	15.6
General opinions					
33. I like doing the English writing tasks online.	0.0	12.5	28.1	53.1	6.3
34. I enjoyed working with peers in the writing tasks.	3.1	6.3	43.8	34.4	12.5
35. I felt comfortable taking part in the group writing tasks.	0.0	0.0	53.1	34.4	12.5
36. It was easy to learn how to participate in the group writing tasks.	0.0	0.0	28.1	62.5	9.4
37. I enjoy the online writing lessons more than the traditional writing ones.	0.0	9.4	25.0	43.8	21.9
38. I believe my writing skills have improved using this online course.	3.1	3.1	50.0	37.5	6.3
39. My confidence in using computers has increased.	3.1	6.3	37.5	34.4	18.8
40. It was easier to discuss the tasks online than face-to-face.	6.3	31.3	37.5	18.8	6.3
41. I have learned how to be a more effective writer in this course.	0.0	12.5	37.5	46.9	3.1
42. Overall, I am satisfied with the course.	0.0	0.0	34.4	56.3	9.4

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Misunderstandings of Communicative Language Teaching

Wen Wu
Division of International Cooperation and Exchanges, Yangtze Normal University
98 Julong Rd. Lidu, Fuling District, Chongqing 408100, China
Tel: 1-778-990-8598 Email: wuwenjay2006@gmail.com

Abstract

Although Communicative Language Teaching is accepted by many English teachers in China as one of the most effective approach in English language teaching, there are still a number of misunderstandings about it. By comparing Johnstone; Sato and Kleinsasser and Thompson as well as Spada, this article focuses on four of the main misunderstandings, which are commonly held by the language teachers and researchers.

Keywords: CLT, Misunderstanding, Meaning, Learner Error, Learners' L1

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is generally regarded as an approach to language teaching. It is based on the theory that the primary function of language use is communication. One of the fundamental principles of CLT is that learners need to engage in meaningful communication to attain communicative fluency in ESL settings. So its primary goal is for learners to develop communicative competence (Hymes, 1971), or simply put, communicative ability. Therefore, many teachers think that CLT emphases the speaking and listening in order to improve their communicative ability by focusing on meaning, and refuses error correction for maintaining the conversation. In this article, the writer tries to analyze the misunderstandings, which are commonly held by the language teachers.

1. CLT means an exclusive focus on meaning

At present, the most popular misunderstanding of CLT should be that CLT is an approach to foreign language education which focuses on meaning to the exclusion of any attention to language forms. But, with the view of most applied linguistics---especially British applied linguistics, this characterization of CLT is not consistent, because they have recognized the importance of a formal language component with CLT. According to their understanding, CLT should be a language educational approach that was intended to include communication, which was not intended to exclude form. However, many language teachers in China was affected by applied linguists such as Prabhu (1987), who argued that grammar is too complex to be taught, and second language acquisition researchers like Krashen (1982), who claimed that grammar can only be acquired unconsciously through exposure to the target language, so they believe that a special attention should be given to the meaning, not the form.

What does classroom research on L2 learning and teaching have to say about this? Since 1980s, classroom researchers and program evaluators have carried out a great deal of researches on the effectiveness of CLT in many countries. Savignon (1972) did an experimental study to examine the contributions of CLT to L2 learning. Her research investigated the effects of adding a communicative component to university-level audio-lingual classes in French. Comparisons of learners who had received the additional component with those who received either an additional cultural component or further audio-lingual practice revealed that learners in the communicative component performed better on the communicative test than those who in the cultural or audio-lingual groups. Learners in the communicative group also performed at least as well on the linguistic tasks as learners in the other two groups. These results demonstrated the benefits of adding a communicative component to structure-based teaching.

Since Savignon's study, other classroom research has indicated that CLT contributes positively to the L2 learners' fluency and communicative abilities. Furthermore, in some instances (e.g. Canadian French immersion programs), CLT has enabled L2 learners to develop comprehension abilities that parallel those of native speakers (Genesee, 1987). At the same time, observational research in CLT classrooms, particularly those in which no attention is given to language form, has shown that students often fail to reach high levels of development and accuracy in many aspects of language (Harley and Swain, 1984, Spada and Lightbown, 1989). The experimental research results have indicated that the inclusion of form-focused instruction leads to improvement in students' knowledge and their ability to use that knowledge (Norris and Ortega, 2000 and Spada, 1997).

In China, there are many language teachers who practice communicative approach by balance form and meaning via combination Grammar-Translation into their classroom; some other reject the CLT because of this misunderstanding of

CLT, and they have realized that exclusive focus on meaning will fail to develop students' language competence. But actually, CLT is not conceptualized as an approach that was intended to exclude form but rather one that was intended to include communication.

2. CLT means no explicit on learner errors

For teachers, there is an embarrassment for fluency and accuracy, especially when meet learner errors. So another misunderstanding about CLT is that it should not include corrective feedback. This idea was affected by the fact that many teachers have been educated to believe that errors are evidence that the learner is testing hypotheses about the target language and in the process, progress is being made. The assumption is that with sufficient time and opportunities to hear and practice the target language, the learners' errors will eventually be replaced with target-like forms.

While some researchers have argued for the total rejection of any type of corrective feedback (Truscott, 1999), this represents an extreme view and is not typical of how most CLT teachers and researchers view feedback on learner errors (Lyster, 1999). Instead, the type of corrective feedback that is widely encouraged and accepted in CLT is implicit and does not interfere with communication. For example, a particular type of feedback, which is called RECAST, has been observed to occur frequently in CLT classrooms. A recast is the teacher's reformulation of a learner's incorrect utterance while maintaining a focus on meaning: for example, the L2 learner says, "His foots are cold," and the teacher responds by saying, "Yes, his feet are cold---he has stayed outside for a long time!"

The recast serves as corrective feedback by providing the learner with the correct form while at the same time confirming the content of the learner's utterance and continuing with the conversation. There are a number of advantages of recast. First, one can be more confident of gaining the student's attention, since one is talking about topics of interest to the student. There is also a strong likelihood that the student will comprehend at least part of what is being said to them, since lexical items are being reflected back to them from their own utterance. Recasts are thus an effective means of maintaining conversation with very beginning learners. It is not surprising, therefore, that they figure heavily in student-teacher discourse (Brown and Bellugi, 1964; Chouiniard and Clark, 2003). They also figure in a range of theoretical approaches to teacher-learner interaction, including interactional linguistics (Selting and Couper-Kuhlen, 2001) and conversation analysis (Norrick, 1991).

According to Brandl. K (2008), the provision of "error corrective" and "positive" feedback as a fundamental principle of CLT permeates all areas of instruction and constitutes a necessity in support of the learning process. And he suggests teachers use recast for feedback during the teaching.

3. CLT means listening and speaking practice

In China, many educators said that, for many learners, the main uses that they are likely to make of the language are oral: getting around in the foreign country if they visit it, talking to visitors from that country, etc. CLT is just for the meet of the learners' needs, therefore, the emphasis of language teaching is likely to be on speaking and listening skills, which is the focus of L2 instruction under the guidance of audio-lingua method. However, from the beginning, many CLT researchers agreed that one of the basic tenets of CLT was that linguistics skills and communicative abilities should not be treated in isolation from each other (Savignon, 1997). In his discussion of the importance of attention to discourse in CLT, Widdowson(1978) claims: " What the learners need to know how to do is to compose in the act of writing, comprehend in the act of reading, and to learn techniques of reading by writing and techniques of writing by reading" (P. 144). Influenced by Widdowson and others, CLT materials writers have produced reading texts that are much more varied in terms of their content than in those typical of traditional structure-base instruction. Also, texts that have been specifically designed to meet the needs of particular groups of L2 readers (e.g. English for academic /scientific purposes) are abundant in CLT pedagogical libraries. Furthermore, the experiences that L2 learners needs to keep in mind the relevant contextual and social factors contributing to their comprehension (i.e. listening and reading) and production (i.e. speaking and writing) has always been part of the fundamental principles and practices of CLT. A glance at recent mainstream textbooks in China will immediately find that they are also likely to be reading and writing a more varied range of texts than those in more traditional classes. CLT involves encouraging learners to take part in---and reflect on---communication in as many different contexts as possible (and as many as necessary, not only for their future language-using needs, but also for their present language-learning needs).

4. CLT means avoidance of the learners' L1

Though the teaching methods popular in the 20th century differed in many ways, they nearly all tried to avoid using the students' first language (L1) in the classroom. The only exceptions were the Grammar-translation Method, which still seems to keep going despite the serious critics and the short-lived Reading Method in US in the 1930s. But everything else from the Direct Method to the Audio-lingual Method to Communicative Language Teaching insists that the less the L1 is used in the classroom, the better the teaching. In the early days the L1 was explicitly rejected, going back to the language teaching revolutions of the late 19th century. Later the L1was seldom mentioned as a possibility, apart from occasional advise about how to avoid it; for example, in task-based learning (one form of CLT) for beginners 'DON'T ban mother tongue use but encourage attempts to use the target language' (Willis, 1996,P.130). This suggests either the mother tongue does not play an important role in foreign language teaching or the issue of native language use does not exist in the classroom, since most of them are native speaker of English accustomed to working with multilingual group of students.

The argument against the use of L1 in L2 classrooms is obvious: Learners need as much exposure to the target language as they can get in order to become successful learners of that language. This is supported by considerable evidence that both the quantity and quality of target language input are crucial factors in L2 learning (Gass, 1997; Lightbown, 1991). However, in a recent paper that calls for a re-examination of the restrictions on L1 use in L2 classrooms, Cook (2001) argues that while "no one will quarrel with providing models of real language use for the students… (this is) not necessarily incompatible with L1 use in the classroom" (P. 409).

Sensible arguments can be made for the principled use of L1 in L2 classrooms and there is theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical support for it. For example, the belief that first and second languages exist in separate compartments in the mind and therefore should be kept separate in the classroom has not received empirical support. Neurolinguistics (Obler, 1982), psycholinguistic (Harris, 1992), and linguistic (Romaine, 1989) research has shown that knowledge overlap of the basic components of linguistic information from two languages as common underlying proficiency. The notion of a common underlying proficiency has pointed to important benefits of L1 knowledge and use particularly for minority language children in bilingual education programs (Ramirez, 1992). This work has shown that there is significant transfer of conceptual knowledge and skills across languages. In a recent study of the L2 development of French immersion students engaged in collaborative tasks, Swain and Lapkin (2002) report that the use of the L1 enabled students to continue with the task and in the process to move forward in achieving their linguistic goals. In addition, Turnbull (2001) points to several pedagogic benefits of L1 use in the classroom (e.g. saving time, providing clearer and more concise explanation).

Despite the evidence that the L1 can have an important and positive role to play in L2 learning, CLT researchers mentioned that we must be careful about exactly how much L1 use is productive. And some CLT researchers suggest that languages teachers present in the classroom must base on the comprehension of the students, otherwise no learning can occur. A teacher's goal needs to be to find the right balance between the use of L1 and L2, which makes sure students understand and at the same time maximizes the use of the target language.

Since the introduction of Communicative Language Teaching in the 1970s, there have been different definitions and interpretations of the communicative approach to foreign language education. So, it has no surprise that there are a lot of misunderstandings of CLT. These four misunderstandings are most commonly held by the language teachers and researchers.

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A Study of an ESP Curriculum for Airline Agents in China

Qi Shen
School of Foreign languages, Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics
Nanjing 210016, China
E-mail: Shenqi928@yahoo.com.cn

Abstract

English for specific purpose (ESP) has for about 30 years been a separate branch of English language Teaching (ELT). Recent years in China, with the development of international trade and foreign exchange, more and more in-service and pre-service staffs are expected to learn practical al and useful English language in order to adapt to the new situation. A course design in this case is initiated for a group of service agents from the airline. The aim of this course is to help the airline agents, whose services will inevitably involve communications with foreign guests in English, develop their language skills in air transport profession.

Keywords: ESP, Course Design, Airline Agents

1. Introduction

English for specific purpose (ESP) has for about 30 years been a separate branch of English language Teaching (ELT). ESP is an umbrella term embracing a number of sub-divisions and is often divided up into two main sub-branches: English for Academic Purposes (EAP), dealing with the use of English in study settings where the main goal of language learning is the ability to cope in the student's chosen academic specialism; and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), where the language is needed in the workplace environment of a job or profession. (Johnson & Johnson, 1998, p.106) Another perspective is of English for Science and Technology, English for Business and Economics and English for Social Science, each with an EAP and EOP division. (St John, 1996, p.3) English for Business Purpose (EBP) is currently the area of greatest activity and growth in ESP. (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p.53)

This English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course is designed for a group of service agents from the airline. As the domains of air transport are mediated through the use of English as an auxiliary language, English proficiency becomes a necessity to airline personnel since nowadays more and more foreign guests visit China by air for traveling and business purposes. The aim of this course is to help the airline agents, whose services will inevitably involve communications with foreign guests in English, develop their language skills in air transport profession.

China Eastern Airline has long been engaged in personnel in-service training programs. According to a joint contract with Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, the airline began to send groups of its personnel to Nanjing for their English training in summer, 2007. There will be 24 learners from the airline coming this summer. All the learners are expected to study in Nanjing for one month and all their accommodation and tuition fees are all sponsored by the airline. Therefore, a study of the course design is preferred in this case.

2. Literature review of ESP Curriculum

There is no set definition for EBP in fact. Pickett highlights the fact that there is more than one face to business communication with some of it being 'a lot nearer the everyday language spoken by the general public than many other segments of ESP. (1986, p.16, cited in Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p.54)

Business English courses require 'the careful research and design of pedagogical materials and activities for an identifiable group of adult learners within a specific learning context' (Johns & Dudley-Evans 1991, cited in St John, 1996, p.3-4)

2.1 Causes of the EBP growth

Swales concludes the causes of this growth as follows:

2.1.1 Historical reasons

This area has been historically poorly researched in comparison to science and technology. (2000, p.5) St John agrees with this by saying 'there is little published research into what constitutes Business English'. (1996, p.3) According to Ellis and Johnson, they consider Business English is an area often neglected by linguistic researchers, who prefer to work on other more easily defined areas of special English. (1994, p.3)

2.1.2 The impact of Internationalization and Globalization

Internationalization and the new globalization have drawn many more business people into bilingual and multilingual occupational settings. (2000, p.5)The new business climate has made it more and more obvious that traditional business language teaching materials are becoming increasingly obsolete in today's multimedia business world. (ibid. p.5)

2.1.3 The Recognition of international marketplace

The emerging recognition of an international marketplace has done something to bring together the strengths of North America business communications research tradition and the investigation of language for business. (ibid. p.5)

2.2 Who needs Business English?

English has become an international language or lingua franca in business communities (Crystal, 1997, p.10) English is no longer the language of England and America, and a classroom which focuses on using English in international contexts needs to reflect this change. (Paltridge, 1991, p.32) Most English-medium communications in business are non-native speaker to non-native speakers. (NNS-NNS) (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p.53) One of the consequences of the role of English as the international language is that NNSs may understand each other more easily than the native speaker (NS) understands them. People who share a first language (L1) may share a common use of English which is not the NS use. (ibid. p.54)

Besides, Ellis and Johnson classify learners of business English into three categories according to their different roles: pre-experience learners, low-experience learners and job-experienced learners. (1994, p.15-7)

2.3 Classifications of EBP

Business English itself has become an umbrella term encompassing what we call English for General Business Purposes (EGBP) and English for Specific Business Purposes (ESBP). (St John, 1996, p.3)

Many learners attend EGBP courses at a language school and groups will usually be formed on the basis of language level rather than job. Most units of the course books contain work on the traditional four skills plus specific grammar and vocabulary development. (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p.55) Dudley-Evans & St John introduce the courses as follows: the construct of the course is often grammatical; the courses are designed to cover the grammar of English systematically; published course books designed for use on the extensive courses; focuses on presentation through listening and/or reading, followed by exercises to practice grammar and vocabulary; teaching focuses on accuracy and correct answers; activities are more open-ended and develop fluency in one or more of the four skills and teach a broad range of English through business settings rather than English for specific business purposes. (ibid. p.55-6)

On the other hand, ESBP courses are run for job-experienced learners who bring business knowledge and skills to the language-learning situation. (ibid. p.56) The features of these courses can be concluded as follows: carefully tailored; focus on one or two language skills and specific business communicative events; materials include published books, framework materials and specially written activities; usually intensive courses; a more deep-end approach is followed, starting from a fluency activity, progressing to language and skills work based on outcome, and leading to further fluency practice and setting and carrier content mainly taken from learners' own business contexts.(ibid. p.56)

2.4 Similarities and differences to other forms of ESP

Business English must be seen in the overall context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), as it shares the important and similar elements of need analysis, syllabus design, and materials selection and development which are common to all fields of work in ESP. (Ellis & Johnson, 1994, p.3) Business English, as a major sub-branch of ESP, is endowed with the following absolute characteristics: First, it is designed to meet specific needs of the learners. Second, it makes uses of the underlying methodologies and activities of the disciplines it serves. Finally, it is centered on the language (grammar, lexis, and register), skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities. (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p.4-5)

As with other varieties of ESP, Ellis and Johnson suggest that Business English implies the definition of a specific language corpus and emphasis on particular kinds of communication in a specific context. They believe 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, albeit in business situations.) (1994, p.3)

2.5 EBP versus EAP

While the principles and approaches of ESP are as relevant to EBP/BE as EAP, there are some remarkable differences between the two fields as follows:

Firstly, in EAP some inkling of the reception-history of a particular text can be obtained by seeing where it was published and how it was cited. In the business world, such traces are rare. (Swales, 2000, p.5)

Secondly, EAP operates within a world where the fundamental concern is the acquisition of knowledge by individuals, while in EBP the purpose is not centered on the learner as an individual but as a member of a transactional world where the fundamental concern is the exchange of goods and services. (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p.72)

Thirdly, in most EAP situations there is an interaction between native and non-native speaker. There is an inbuilt balance between the interactants at the level of English language competence. In addition, there is a further imbalance of power and authority, since the NNS often has a dependency on the NS's academic position and role. In EBP, most interactions are between non-native speakers and the balance of power depends on their business relationship. So it is impossible to predict on the basis of language where power lies. (ibid. p.72)

Fourthly, in English L1 situations, the NNS generally has to adapt to both language and culture. In EBP situations, the NNS may use English as an international language or lingua franca but not adapt to the culture. (ibid. p.72-3)

Lastly, EBP teachers do not generally have any direct experience of their learners' context whereas all EAP teachers have studied in an academic environment. (ibid. p.73)

2.6 Characteristics of EBP language

Comparatively, the language of Business English as a special area of ESP has its unique features as follows:

2.6.1 Sense of purpose

A sense of purpose can be regarded as the most important characteristic of exchanges in the context of business meetings, telephone calls and discussions. (Ellis & Johnson, 1994, p.7) All the settings in EBP reflect strong business purposes in this sense. The Language is used to achieve an end or a result, and its successful use is seen in terms of a successful outcome to the business transaction or event. (ibid. p.7) In this sense, users of Business English, in order to achieve more in their jobs, need to speak English. World business is very competitive: competition exists between companies and also within companies, between employees striving to better their careers. (Ellis & Johnson, 1994, p.7) So it follows that performance objectives take priority over educational objectives or language learning for its own sake. (ibid.p.7)

2.6.2 Social aspects

In the special contexts of international business, there should be some courtesy to be maintained. Social contacts are often highly ritualized since there is a need for an internationally accepted way of doing things so that people from different cultures and with different mother tongues can quickly feel more comfortable with one another. (ibid. p.8) Basically, formulaic language is used in the context of a routine pattern of exchanges. The style of the language is polite but also short and direct and both the style and content of social interactions will be typified by a desire to build a good business relationship while avoiding over-familiarity. (ibid. p.8)

2.6.3 Clear communication

In business contexts, the language should be both clear in meaning and concise in delivery. Information has to be conveyed with minimum risk of misunderstanding and the time for processing needs to be short. Therefore, there is a preference for clear, logical, thought emphasized by the kinds of words that indicate the logical process. (ibid. p. 9) For example, a point that is ambiguous in a business letter will cause trouble to both sides, and further exchange of letters for explanation will become inevitable, thus time will be lost. (Gan, 1996, p.1)

There is also a need to be concise, especially when communicating by fax or telephone and certain familiar concepts may be expressed in word clusters to avoid circumlocution. (Ellis & Johnson, 1994, p. 10) Therefore, clearness and conciseness in Business English often 'go hand-in-hand and the elimination of wordy jargon can help to make a business context or a business letter clearer and at the same time more concise.' (Gan, 1996, p.1)

EBP is currently the area of greatest activity and growth in the domain of ESP. I have reviewed some fundamental concepts of EBP, distinguished it from other forms of ESP and discussed some key issues of EBP. Like many other forms of ESP, Business English would be of great benefit to ELT teachers' research and practice.

3. Course design for Airline Agents

3.1 Course profile

3.1.1 Type of the course

As a typical English course for occupational purposes (EOP), this course is scheduled to be conducted as an intensive course in which learners' time will be committed for four hours a day, 8 am to 12 am, for 4 weeks. This course is an in-service program and will be run as a parallel with experience course, since all of the learners have worked in the airline for one to three years and have gained considerable working experience in their target jobs. The needs in this course fall into the immediate needs in that all the learners expect this course could be applicable and meet the English requirements in their profession. Thus, learners often seem to be much more motivated by the course that would prepare them in their present jobs.

3.1.2 Course focus

This course is intended for a broad focus: learners will not only be involved in all four basic skills, but also concentrate on a range of target events, such as professional skills and career content. The topics covered in the course will reflect the specific needs of learners. English will be employed as the medium of instruction and as a classroom language. Learners are encouraged to speak English in their daily life during the course period so as to promote the learners' communicative skills and create an English speaking environment.

3.2 Overview of the course

Course length: Total 80 hours (20 four-hour sessions)

5 days per week

Size of group: 24 participants

Occupation: Air transport personnel in China Eastern Airline

Age: 20-25 years olds.

Participants: Learners have obtained a degree or certificate and worked in the airline for at least 1 year and have an upper-intermediate level of English proficiency.

Location: Nanjing in Jiangsu Province, China

Overall aims of the course: At the end of this course, learners are expected to demonstrate:

The ability to participate effectively in air transport business through the accomplishment of job specific tasks via communicative activities; the ability to overcome language barriers and improve customer service through the specific techniques; and the ability to read air transport materials related to different genres in English through understanding reading strategies.

3.3 Content of the course

This course is comprehensive in that the content covers the basic language skills in speaking, listening and reading and also involves air transport practice. In this sense, materials selected should be used as a source of language, a learning support, for motivation and stimulation or for reference.(Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p.170-171)

The major criteria for selecting materials are whether the materials are useful and stimulating to the learners, to what extent the materials match the stated learning objectives, (whether the carrier content can match the real content) and to what extent the materials support the learning. (ibid. p. 173) Since the practice in air transport involves professional knowledge and language skills, instructional materials to be used in this course are mainly focused on air transport English course books and civil aviation readings, together with teacher-generated in-house materials.

Set course books are:

Weston, D. (1993). *Civil Aviation English Course*. Tianjin: China Civil Aviation Press.

Zhu, P. (2000). *An English course of air transport.* Tianjin: China Civil Aviation Press.

Zhou, S. T. (1996). *Dialogues in customer service.* Tianjin: China Civil Aviation Press.

The in-house materials representing language input are collected from a range of sources which mainly encourage learners' motivation in learning and are related to their jobs or profession. Most of the materials are authentic or real-life based in order to stimulate learners' interests. The learning process consists of task-based learner-centered activities. So all the tasks devised seek to enable the learners to recognize their progress and weakness in language learning. When in class and outside the class, they are given the opportunities to use English more smoothly and fluently during the course.

For the sake of learners' engagement, materials of models, pictures and handouts include interesting and comprehensible examples from a variety of related sources which are suitable to the target needs. For instance, a globe will be advisable when teaching identifying world time zones, a model of aircraft when teaching flight seat assignment. A good teaching establishment must have a resource unit to support the teacher of this course and provide these materials.

Similarly, teaching of English speaking employs a number of audio-visual materials such as cassettes, videos, VCDs, DVDs, CD-ROMs and other forms of multimedia materials. To help improve learners' listening and speaking, all the in-house reading materials are equipped with cassette tapes.

3.4 Needs analysis

Needs analysis refers to the process of determining the needs for which a learner or group of learners requires a language and arranging the needs according to priorities. (Richards et al., 1992, p.304) Needs analysis is regarded as an essential procedure in the process of ESP courses and at the same time is a necessity in learner-centered approach.

In this ESP course, needs analysis is of importance to organization of teaching in that the learners' necessities, wants, lacks and constraints as put forward by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) are specific and may be quite distinct from those of university students.

Objective needs analysis results in content specifications derived from an analysis if the target communicative situations in which learners are likely to find themselves. (Nunan, 1988, p.44) So the learners' objective needs have been revealed from the content of the course.

To achieve more information of target situation analysis (TSA), first, structured interviews with airline administrators have been used before the course. Trainer gets information about their target needs and learner performance expectations. Second, since the trainers may not be familiar with the real aspects of air transport practice in addition to the book-based content, trainers have observed at the airport the daily functions of air transport service and developed many authentic reports.

As for the present situation analysis (PSA), first, since similar courses have run for several times before, it is a good way for the trainers to discuss with previous course teachers to identify problems in the past courses. Second, a placement English assessment is scheduled to get information of learners' present situation analysis. The language assessment includes listening, speaking and reading sections. This assessment will provide the trainers with the participants' present language ability, and also diagnose their major language needs. Finally, questionnaires will be handed out to collect participants' motivations and interests in learning and their previous learning experiences.

Besides, since the group size is not big, the information will be collected through in-depth exploration and through face-to-face interviews with the participants. Only in this way, learners' subjective needs, especially their needs of the outcomes of the course could be found out. This type of interviews is scheduled to be conducted at both the beginning and middle of the course.

3.5 Evaluation and assessment

3.5.1 Learner assessment

The reason for assessment lies in acquiring feedback to aid learning or achieving a comparable measure of competence. (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p. 210) In many cases, although, tests may be inappropriate on a short intensive ESP course, (ibid. p.210) this course, out of the two concerns, requires immediate, tangible evidence of course outcomes and improvements. Besides, as manipulated, (Weston, 1993, p.3) these airline agents have to sit for an English proficiency test after learning which is examined by an examination board in NUAA under the supervision of China Civil Aviation Bureau.

3.5.2 Course evaluation

Since the ESP course exists to satisfy a particular education need, a course evaluation helps to show how well the course is actually fulfilling the need. (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 152) In this course, the following techniques may be used to evaluate: (1) Test results, (2) Questionnaires and (3) Interviews.

The outcomes of the evaluation will indicate from all aspects how well this course prepares the learners to be confidently and competently perform in their target situations.

4. Conclusion

ESP courses in China have recently been popular with the development of Chinese Economy and society, since China's Entry into the WTO. More and more staffs require practical and purposeful training in English for their employment and service. So it is urgent that tentative ESP courses should be designed to satisfy their needs.

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Table 1. Outline of the course

Day	Topic	Hour
1	Airline services introduction	4
2	Readings of airline services	4
3	Reading The Regulation of international airline services	4
4	Customer services: Handling Telephone reservations	4
5	Workshop: handling telephone reservations	4
6	Handling information enquiry	4
7	Tickets and fares	4
8	Passenger services at the airport	4
9,10	Tutorial group discussion :Offering Passenger services	8
11	Providing Baggage service	4
12	Workshop: solving baggage service problems	4
13	Services for departing and arriving passengers	4
14	Tutorial: factors affecting passenger demand	4
15	Reading: problems in airline scheduling	4
16	Handling Passenger enquiry at the airport	4
17	Reading: of Air freight	4
18	Reading: developments of air freight services	4
19	Workshop: airline pricing policy	4
20	End-of-course assessment	4

Table 2. Course framework

Target Events	Rhetorical Awareness and skill areas	Language Usage		Functions	Materials	Topics
		Grammar	Vocabulary			
Presenting effective communication	Dialogues in customer service	Numerals, tense	Choice of lexis, Technical words	Inquiry, Offering, request and reply	Course book and in-house	Telephone inquiry; Information enquiry;
	Using appropriate speaking	Modals, Imperative sentences	Verbs: request, suggest,	Time, space,		
Providing Customer services	Handling air transport practice	Imperative sentence, Simple and complex clauses,	Nouns: Technical terms Verbs: suggest, remind, permit, Explain, demonstrate	Suggestion, Prediction, reminding, Promise, Calculation, Measurement, Quality	Course book and in-house	Telephone reservation, Ticketing and fares, Lost and found service, Baggage service, departing and arriving, pricing
	Solving possible problems	Imperative sentence, sequence markers		Agree, disagree, Permission, negation, interpret		
Reading materials of air transport	Understanding and utilizing materials and documents of air transport in different genres		Nouns: Technical words, air transport abbreviation	Quality, shape, color, size, material, tables, tags	In-house authentic	Regulation and policy, flight schedules, air freight

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Students' Use of Modals in Narrative Compositions: Forms and Functions

Malachi Edwin Vethamani (Corresponding author)
Faculty of Educational Studies
University Putra Malaysia
43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia
Tel: 60-12-318-1550 Email: mevethamani@yahoo.co.uk

Umi Kalthom Abd Manaf
Maktab Rendah Sains MARA
MARA Headquarters
Jalan Raja Laut, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Tel: 60-12-388-0402 Email: ukalmanaf@yahoo.com

Omid Akbari
Imam Reza University, Mashhad, Iran
Tel: 98-915-517-5368 Email: omidakbari767@yahoo.com

Abstract

This article presents the findings of a corpus based research that investigated Malaysian ESL learners' use of modals in two written tasks. The aim of the study was to investigate the distribution and functions of modals used in the students' writing. The research design comprised a qualitative technique through discourse analysis supplemented with some descriptive statistics derived from a concordancer which identified modals used by the students at two different levels. The findings showed that the preferred modals for the two levels are modals *can, will* and *could* which were used to express ability and certainty. Modals of probability/possibility showed lower frequencies of use in the writing. Also, students at the lower level were less competent in using past form modals as compared to those at the higher level. This study indicates that the students were able to perceive the conceptual meaning of each modal and their communicative function.

Keywords: Modals, Modality, Corpus, Discourse Analysis, Narratuive Compositions

1. Introduction

The complexity of the English modal auxiliary system has been a major problem in learning and teaching of English as the second language. The modal auxiliary system of the standard formal English is complex, with the same modals expressing different notions, ranging from probability through permission to obligation. Literature has shown that ESL learners face problems in comprehending and using the English modal system accurately.

Modals are not only auxiliaries in the prescriptive grammarian sense but they also appear to contribute to the semantics of communication and communication without the knowledge of grammar will fail as structure will be lacking. Grammar, as prescribed by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (Ministry of Education, 1991) is a set of rules which speakers of a language use to make meaning. Modals, the focus of this study, are part of grammar and their expressions have formed an important part of the grammar and semantics of all languages, including English.

It is a challenging task for teachers of ESL learners to impart knowledge on modal auxiliaries and for the learners to be able to learn and use the knowledge in their written work. DeCarrico (1986) and Hinkel (1995), in their respective work on modals, stress that L2 learners use modals differently from L1 learners. They found that L2 learners use modal verbs more in context as opposed to L1 learners. The current study, which focuses on how Malaysian ESL learners' use modals in their written work, will contribute to the data on how Malaysian L2 learners use modal verbs.

The Malaysian ESL teachers, according to Hawanum (2004), being L2 speakers themselves, are often not certain as to how to go about teaching grammar to their students. They are not sure how much detail should go into explaining grammatical items. When the Malaysian New English Language Curriculum (KBSM), based on a communicative model of language teaching learning, was implemented in 1988, the teaching of grammar emerged as problematic (Pillay and North, 1997). Having students of mixed abilities and mixed interests in a classroom has resulted in difficulties for some language teachers (Vethamani, 2001). Teachers are unclear of the role of grammar in the new curriculum and are uncertain how grammar should be integrated into their lessons.

Grammatical items have been one of the most problematic areas for learners of the English language, especially with Malaysian ESL learners, who are L2 speakers (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1983, Hughes and Heah 1993; Holden et al., 1993; Gaudart, Hughes and Michael 1996; Pillay and North, 1997; Hawanum, 2004). One of the problematic grammatical items faced by Malaysian ESL learners is the correct use of modals (Hughes and Heah, 1993). Rosli and Edwin (1989) in their error analysis of Form Four English composition found that students in both urban and rural areas have problems using verb forms and this includes the modal auxiliary since a modal is formed with a verb phrase. Wong (1983: 136) also agrees with the fact that the modal auxiliary system of standard formal English is extremely complex, with the same modals sometimes being used to express different notions like that of probability, possibility and certainty, and of inclination, ability, permission and obligation. This results in confusion for ESL learners, and teachers need to be careful when teaching this part of grammatical item to the students.

The syllabus of the Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah (KBSM) or the Integrated Secondary School Curriculum for English language as outlined by the Curriculum Development Center (CDC) of the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MoE) lists several modals for Malaysian ESL learners. The modals, which include can, could, will, should, may, might, must, need to and have to, as stipulated in the Curriculum Specifications of English language, are used across a wide semantic field. These few modals are used to serve multi-functionally across the notional categories in the system (de Silva, 1981). Malaysian ESL students would use these modals in so many ways with various meanings possibly leading to incoherence. Hence, with these few modals listed by the syllabus, the study seeks to investigate the use of modals by Malaysian ESL learners.

1.1 Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to investigate the use of English modals in terms of their functions from data made available by the EMAS Corpus. The focus of this study has been narrowed down to examining the use of modals in two written tasks of ESL learners from Form 1 and Form 4.

1.2 Research Questions

In view of the objective mentioned above, this study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the modals used by Malaysian ESL learners in Form 1 and Form 4, respectively, in two written tasks?
2. For what functions are the modals used by the students in Form 1 and Form 4, respectively, in two written tasks?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definitions of Modals

Linguists take as the basic modal notions those expressed by the central modal auxiliary verbs may, might; can, could; will, would; shall, should; and must (Hoye, 1997). These modal auxiliaries are used to express events or actions resulting from the "conceptions of the mind", which may not lead to any results in the future. Fowler's (1986) description of modal auxiliaries is that they are words that signal caution or confidence to various degrees. It also provides an important means of developing politeness strategies; for example a sentence with no modal would sound impolite: "come here!" as opposed to "Could you come here?" making the request more polite (Simpson 1993).

Linguists have given various definitions of modals and modality. Lyons (1971) regards modality as having to do with possibility or probability, necessity or contingency, rather than merely with truth or falsity, and Marino (1973) states modality as the speaker's view of the potentials involved in the prediction. These different definitions make learning the modal auxiliary intricate.

Shaffer (2004) defines modal and modality as the conceptual domains of necessity and possibility. It is also expressed in a given language by modals (lexemes or auxiliaries) or grammatical mood (inflectional coding on the verb). Despite the attention received on the study of modality in the recent years, linguists have not agreed on what constitutes the modality domain. Consequently, how the researchers delimits and defines modality affects what is studied.

2.2 Modals and the English Language

The list of the most common lexical ways of expressing modality according to Hemeren (1978: 10-11) is as follows:

Nouns such as chance, hope, presumption and expectation; intention and determination.

Adjectives such as conceivable, possible, likely and obvious; appropriate and necessary. In other adjectives such as sure, surprise, able and willing and finally doubtful and certain.

Adverbs such as hardly and perhaps; evidently, assuredly, fortunately, regrettably, surprisingly, and strangely.

Verbs: Main verbs such as doubt, think, believe and predict; suggest; want, prefer, desire, permit and forbid. Modal verbs such as shall, should, will, would, can, could, may, might, must and ought, which students are more familiar.

Some of the modals may be combined in the same sentence and may not occur individually as in the sentence, "Perhaps he might have built it" (Hemeren, 1978: 11) with the word perhaps and might reinforcing each other, or the modals appear in a sentence with no equivalent meaning as in "Certainly, he might have built it," which Lyons (1977: 807-8) calls modally harmonic and non-harmonic. These varied ways of showing modality can be difficult for ESL learners and this is one of the complications mentioned by Celcie-Murcie and Larsen Freeman (1983), Thompson (2002) and other linguists.

Thompson (2002) asserts that in order to reduce complexities of modals, we need to have a good understanding of the complexity. Then only teachers would be able to explain the intricacies in terms of the rules that come with a modal. When ESL learners have a good grasp of modals, they can avoid making errors in their writing.

2.3 Modals and Malaysian English

Political and economic forces have determined the development of Malaysian English. Due to government policies, the English language has evolved from a foreign language (during the colonial powers), into a second language (Vethamani, 2007) and its status as a second language and the roles it carries are now more defined (Jowati Juhary, 2003). The resurgence of interest in the English language has caused many Malaysians to identify with the Malaysian English (ME) and are comfortable using a variety of their own (Menon, 1999). The variety that has emerged does not stray far from the Standard English. This can be seen from a survey done on Malaysians' attitude towards English in Malaysia (Crismore, Ngeow and Soo, 1996).

Crismore, et al. (1996) attempted to identify the kind of English acceptable in Malaysia and they concluded that most Malaysians would prefer Standard British English in order to be understood internationally. Most of the respondents from Crismore's study felt that the English used by most Malaysians are simplification form of Standard English. Thus, inadvertently, mistakes usually occur that have to be corrected. Advances in Information Communication Technology (ICT) have made English a vital tool not only for communication but also commerce, medicine and education (Jowati Juhary, 2003). Even though many have begun to realise that it is no longer necessary or desirable to aim at a foreign standard of English for themselves (Wong, 1983), some would still have the ideas of learning to speak the Standard English. Perceptions and attitudes are indicators of the growth or decline of a variety of English as well as predictors of literacy level. With the surge in the interest of internationally being understood, there could be a growth of Standard English in Malaysia.

The use of verbs according to the Malaysian usage tends to be slightly different than the standard British English. For example, in the use of modals *will* and *would*. Both can be meant as permission or request as in the example, "Will you be free tonight?" as opposed to "Would you be free tonight?" Most Malaysians would use the latter since it is considered more polite (Tongue, 1979). Most Malaysians also perceive politeness through its own cultural values. We see the Malays perceiving politeness as "gentleness," the Chinese as "harmony" and the Indians as "moral refinement." These are manifested in different language behaviours and the language use where being polite is deemed necessary when asking for permission, request and others. Thus, certain modals like could, should and would which are sometimes referred to as the past tense form modals are used to imply politeness (Suraiya, 2002).

The findings from this study hope to reveal students' linguistic competence or incompetence in using modals in their written work. The findings will also highlight some level of mastery in the use of modals by these students. Examining the two levels of students' output would enable the researchers to identify the mastery of modals used, as they grow older with the knowledge they have acquired as they move on to a higher level.

3. Methodology

This study employs discourse analysis with some descriptive statistics using the MonoConc Pro 2.2 (Barlow, 2003). The research was designed to investigate Malaysian ESL learners' use of modals in the written narrative compositions using data from the EMAS Corpus (Arshad et al., 2000). The data in the EMAS Corpus consists of written and spoken data from students of three different levels: Primary 5, Form 1 and Form 4 in the Malaysian school system. The data comprised the "Picture-Based" and "The Happiest Day of My Life" narrative compositions. For the purpose of this study, data from Form 1 and Form 4 students will be used.

This corpus-based study comprises qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative analysis aims at a detailed description of the phenomenon under study while the quantification techniques give a precise picture of absolute and relative (in) frequency of occurrence of the particular phenomenon (de Monnink, 2005). The use of the concordancing programme helped to generate statistical description that aided the analysis. Descriptive statistics enabled the researchers to summarise the most vital properties of the observed data, where the abstracted data can be used in inferential statistics which answers questions or formulated as hypothesis (Oakes, 1998). The qualitative design employed offer a rich and detailed perspective on the data as well as enabling very fine distinctions to be drawn. A qualitative analysis was preferred because as de Monnink (1997) has posited a quantitative analysis would lack the descriptive richness of the nature of structures which a qualitative analysis could provide and also gives subjective judgements about the rarity of the phenomenon.

3.1 The EMAS Corpus

According to O`keeffe, McCarthy and Carter (2007), a corpus is a collection of texts, written or spoken, which is stored on a computer. The data used in this study was obtained from the EMAS *(The English Language of Malaysian School Students)* Corpus. The EMAS Corpus was developed by seven researchers from the Faculty of Educational Studies in Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). The data in the EMAS Corpus consists of Malaysian students' written and spoken work; thus it was thought to be appropriate for the researchers to use the corpus to investigate how Malaysian ESL learners used modals in their written work. The main purpose of the EMAS Corpus was to establish baseline data of the English language proficiency of Malaysian students in both written and spoken forms as well as to examine developmental patterns through the data obtained.

3.2 Sampling of the Sub-Corpus

A sub-corpus was compiled for the purpose of the study and the written tasks selected for the sub-corpus was based on purposive sampling. For this study, the purpose is to discover, understand and gain insight as to how students from the two different levels used modals in their written work.

The size of the sample of the sub-corpus was decided based on a table by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) which was adapted by Powell (1991:80). Therefore, for this study 84 "The Happiest Day of My Life" narrative compositions and 126 "Picture-Based" narrative compositions, giving a total of 210 narrative compositions were selected and analysed. Students from 7 schools in Form 1 and Form 4 levels wrote the "The Happiest Day of My Life" essay, while students from 9 schools at Form 1 and Form 4 levels wrote the "Picture-Based", thus there are more narrative compositions in the "Picture-Based" essay in comparison to those in "The Happiest Day of My Life" narrative compositions.

For data analysis, three independent raters were appointed to aid in the analysis during the preliminary study. For the actual study, however, only one independent rater was used to reconfirm the analysis carried out as well as to cross-check. The independent rater was then briefed on the categories used to synchronise analysis, thus allowing the researchers to answer all the research questions.

3.3 Discourse Analysis

The method of discourse analysis was used to analyse sentences in the two written tasks and also to identify the function of the modals used. In this study, the use of modals in students written work need to be analysed since it is a means of communication where modals are used to refer to a stance and the writer's attitude. The written work of the students will be examined with the inter-rater, leading to a more sensitive, penetrating analysis that a discourse analysis will allow. Discourse analysis is used to analyse the data so that language characteristics that extend across clause boundaries can be focussed (Biber, et al., 1998).

The texts, through discourse analysis, were read with an independent rater. It is important to understand the modals and the functions they depicted in the students' writing. Also the discourse analysis employed in this study will show if there were repetitious use of modals by these students.

4. Results And Discussion

4.1 Distribution of Modals in Form 1 and Form 4 (RQ 1)

The data that was generated by a concordance search of modals used in the students' written work at the Form 1 and Form 4 levels provided the empirical figures to determine the distribution of modals at the two different levels. Specifically, the language software MonoConc Pro 2.2 (Barlow, 2003) was used to process the data to arrive at the descriptive statistics. The results are tabulated and discussed according to the two levels in the following sections.

4.1.1 Form 1 Level

The modals that appeared at form 1 level were *must, have to, could, should, will* and *may* and their negated forms. Since some of the modals had appeared in the previous levels, their appearance at the higher levels would serve to reinforce students' knowledge on their use. A total of 9 different modals were found in the narrative compositions at the Form 1 level and they were *can, could, will*, *would, have to, need to, must, should, may* and their negated forms. The modal *need to* is only introduced at the Form 4 level, but was identified at this level. The frequency count of the modals used in the narrative compositions totaled to 119 instances as shown in Table 1. The modals highlighted in the table are not part of the syllabus of Form 1. However, they were also included in the analysis of modals found in the students' narrative compositions at this level. The figures in Table 1 show that the present tense forms of the modal *can,* which has not been taught, has the highest frequency of 42, while the modal *could,* showed only 29 instances. Below are examples of sentences with the modal *can* found at this level.

1. "The other girl looked for people who *can help* her friend" (SMTA-P-f1-03.7)
2. "… asked Ali to help the girl because they *cannot swim*" (SMTA-P-f1-03.12)

The examples show that students at this level used more present tense form modals than the past. Since the present tense form is more commonly found, this could be an indication of students' preference for the present tense form, especially those at the lower levels. The examples below are sentences with the modal *could* found in the search:

1. "She swolled too much water and *could not wake up*" (SMTA-P-f1-07.16)
2. "She *could not swim* to the river bank…." (SMTA-P-f1-05.5)

Alternatively, *could* has more functions than *can*, which the students may not have acquired as the data do not support this. One such function of *could* is used with the pragmatic function of politeness. Another, which most grammarians would agree to, is the degree of probability, differs in sentences that use *could* instead of *can,* such as in "She *could go* (if she wanted to)" versus "She can go." In the former sentence, probability is more prevalent than in the latter. Students at the Form 1 level may have not acquired the knowledge of these additional roles of *could* and thus limit its use to the "ability" function as a past tense form of *can.*

The distributions of *will* and *would* are similar to modals *can* and *could,* where the instances of the present tense form was found to be more than the past tense form. The examples below are some sentences identified with the use of *will*.

1. "…everybody *will* see my face in all the activities" (SMTA-H-f1-03.6)
2. "I was very happy…and I *won't* forget it…" (SMART-H-f1-08.15)

The findings show that *will* is used much more than *would,* with 29 instances as opposed to *would* with only 9. Nevertheless, the occurrence of *would* at 9 instances at this level is due to acquisition outside the classroom as it is not included in the syllabus. The examples below show the use of the modal *would* found in the narrative compositions.

1. "The doctor said that she *would* be dead if she…." (SMHK-P-f1-02.12)
2. "They also went home quickly so that Sean and Susan *wouldn'*t catch a cold" (SMTA-P-f1-06.27)

The examples above indicated students' competence in using the modal would even though it is not included in the syllabus.

Another modal found in the present and past tense form is *have to*, as shown in the following examples:

1. "…I *had to* admit it was delicious" (SMPM-H-f1-07.25)
2. "Nicholas and I *had to fight* with our classmates…." (SMSAB-H-f1-01.9)

This modal has the same function as the modal *must*. The low count of the modal must with two instances as shown in Table 1 could probably be because the students did not find the situations necessary to use in their narrative compositions. However, in both instances, the students were able to use the modal correctly.

The students' ability in using these few modals indicated their competence in using modals that were taught to them as well as those not taught to them. However, *need to* for necessity may also be indicated by other modals such as *have to*, and there were 3 instances of the modal found at this level in the narrative compositions. The modal *need to* is a semi-modal according to Coates (1983) and Mindt (1995), and *need* according to Coates is the modal.

At this point, it is premature to make conclusions about students' competence or ability in using the modals especially those which appear infrequently. The investigation reveals that the three most frequently used modals are *can, will* and *could.* The use of these three most common modals comprised more than half of all modals used by the students. This shows that students are directed by two types of modal function: ability and certainty.

4.1.2 Form 4 Level

At the Form 4 level students would have been exposed to modals *may, must, have to, could, should, will, can, might* and their negated forms. The search identified 494 instances of modals used in the students' written work. There were 11 different modals used by students at this level in the narrative compositions. This shows an increase in the use of different types of modals at the Form 4 level in comparison to 9 that was identified at the Form 1 level. There is also a definite increase in the number of past tense form modals used by the students at this level. The modal *could* and its negated form showed 146 instances of use and, in contrast, *can* actually showed only 96 instances. However, the modal *will* showed 118 instances while the modal *would* shows 56 instances of use. Table 2 shows the frequency count of modals found used in the narrative compositions at the Form 4 level.

The modals highlighted in the table are not stated in the Curriculum Specifications for English Language. The modal *could/couldn't* showed a high frequency count of 146 in the narrative compositions. As mentioned earlier, students used c*ould* more than *can.* This confirms the finding of Mindt (1995) that past tense form modals are more common in narration, since the subjects in the present study also had to narrate an event in each of the tasks. The high frequency of the modal *cou*ld may be related to an earlier point on the functions of *could* which have not been acquired by the students at the Form 1 level, causing its use to be much fewer than the modal *can*. The 146 instances of *could* at the Form 4 level would mean that the knowledge may have been acquired allowing the students a wider repertoire of functions of modal *could*. However, it could also easily be attributed to the fact that the students' overall language ability has improved with age and learning, and this caused them to write more, which in turn would mean more sentences. Whatever the contributing factor may be, it would appear that the students have the competence in using a range of modals in many situations. The examples below indicate students' ability to use the past tense form modals *could* and *would:*

1. "I *could hear* the sound of my parents talking over breakfast" (SMTA-P-f4-02.3)
2. "I even told her that I felt it *would* be funny to scare her" (SMTA-P-f4-01.23)

The 96 instances of the modal *can* is high and expected of students of the Form Four level for the same reason given for the modal *could*, which is that the students' have generally improved in their language proficiency and are producing longer narrative compositions and therefore more sentences. This is also an indicator that they are more capable and competent in using this modal. The search also identified 118 instances of the modal *will/will not* used by the students in the narrative compositions.

The next two modals which appeared in the search were *must and must not* with 22 counts. The semi-modal *have to* is another modal that appeared in the search with 25 counts. Despite not being in the syllabus of this level, the modal *would/wouldn't* shows a high occurrence of 56 counts. However, this can be attributed to the students' tendency to use *would* instead of *will* in certain circumstances.

Other modals that have emerged in the search were *may* (7 counts), *might* (6 counts), *should* and *should not/shouldn't* (9 counts). All these modals are in the syllabus at this level. The last modal is *shall*, which is not part of the syllabus. There were 3 counts of shall in the search, two of which are given below:

1. "*Shall* we *invited* John join with us?" (SMPM-P-f4-02.8)
2. "She also don't know how what she *shall doing*" (SMMA-P-f4-07.15)

The sentences above have inaccurate verb forms but they were noted to be acceptable and included in the count since the ungrammaticality does not impede the understanding the sentences. Another modal that is not in the syllabus is *need* with 6 counts of *need* found in the narrative compositions. This is an indication that some students have acquired the knowledge of modal *need* outside the classroom.

4.1.3 Summary for Research Question 1

Table 3 summarises the results of the concordance search of modals identified in the two narrative compositions at the two educational levels. The figures in the table show that students use more present tense form of the modal at Form 1 level than at the Form 4 level. Therefore, students at the higher level show more competence in using the past tense forms of modals.

At the higher level, these students would have already acquired most of the modals, along with other language units, and therefore were able to use various modals in their narrative compositions accordingly. This is shown by the percentage of the use of modals *could and can*. The modal *could* at the Form 4 level shows 29.6% of use, whereas the modal *can* showed 19.4%, a difference of 10% more of the modal c*ould*. This is an indication that students' knowledge of modals has improved at this stage and the students have acquired not only most of the modals, but also their functions and so were able to choose and decide modals according to the appropriate situations.

A different pattern of use was seen with the modals *will* and *would*. Even though the modal *would* is not part of the syllabus, students at this level were able to use it and this is indicated in the figures shown in the table above. By percentage, the use of the modal *will* is rather consistent at the two levels. The figures show 24% of occurrences at both levels.

Overall, the most preferred modals for the two levels are modals *can, will* and *could*, which are the modals of ability and certainty for this group of Malaysian ESL learners. The Malay equivalents of modals *will* and *can* are "boleh" and "akan," which are commonly used in Malay, the former much more than the latter. This would be a contributing factor to the high frequencies of *can* and *will* in the narrative compositions (Bahiyah and Wijasuriya, 1998). An alternative explanation is given by Oxford (1990) who stated that the use of the mother tongue is one of the strategies used by ESL learners to overcome limitations in the target language, and since more than 50% of the students from the EMAS Corpus were Malay, and Bahasa Melayu (Malay Language) is the first language, this could be the reason for the high occurrence of the modal *can*. The other modals although varied in type occur in a scattered manner with low frequency counts compared to the top three most commonly used modals. The low frequency of the other modals might be attributed to the fact that they are more formal than *can and will.* Their production would presuppose the use of formal English which would (1) not normally be found in narration, and (2) not be preferred or even be within the grasp of ESL learners at the school level. In the case of *could,* it is a modal of ability but preferred due to other reasons such as politeness perceived by high proficiency speakers of English, hence, the higher distribution of *could* at the Form Four level.

The two modals, *would and shall*, which are not in the syllabus, were found in their positive and negative forms, in the present and past tense forms. According to Biber et al. (2002), the past tense form of the modals is usually less frequent than the present. For example, the present tense form of *will* is more common than *would*, and *can* is more common than *could*. However, between *shall* and *should*, the latter is more common. Mindt (1995) states that *should*, which is the past tense form of the modal *shall* is more commonly used in writing. Also, he states that shall seems to express future time orientation and occur mainly in affirmative contexts. This seemed to be how the students see the use of *shall* and *should* in their writing.

It was found that students used more of the modals of ability which are *can, could* and their negated forms. The present tense form of the modal *can* was most commonly used in the lower level in comparison to the higher level in both narrative compositions. This is mainly because at the higher level students were found to use more types of modals compared to the lower level. Another finding is that students at the lower level were able to use *can* even though it is included in the English syllabus at the Form 2 level. The modal *will*, on the other hand, has a progression of use from Form 1 to Form 4 level. This phenomenon could be due to the fact that *will* was introduced to the students as a future tense to indicate future events and was only taught as a modal to indicate necessity at the Form 1 level. This reinforced students' understanding and awareness of *will*.

The findings also showed that *can* was used more at the two levels in comparison to the modal *could.* The same pattern was found for the modals *will/would and may/might. Shall/should* showed a different pattern as *should* was used more often by the students. Biber et al. (2002) also found similar distributions for *shall/should* in the LSWE corpus, where *should* is more commonly used than *shall. Shall* showed a lower frequency of occurrences. However, this is not unusual as *shall* is not taught to the students. Students are also not exposed to *shall* because it is the least frequent modals used in expository prose (Mindt, 1995 and Biber et al., 2002) and only used in very formal writings such as legal documents. Mindt (1996), states that in teaching English, the syllabus should start with the main clauses before introducing sub-clauses. With that reason, it is appropriate for the present form modals to be introduced first before the past forms. It is different with the KBSR/KBSM syllabus for the English language, where the modals are introduced according to the functions instead. The other modals listed in the syllabus were identified with low frequency count.

4.2 Modals and their Functions as Used by the Students at the Two Levels (RQ2)

Each modal that is used by the students in their sentences has a different function. This section will answer the second research question by listing the distribution of the function that each modal refers to. To do this all the sentences which contained modals were identified in the narrative compositions and listed according to the levels. Then the modals and their negated forms were analysed according to their functions. For this purpose, the functions stipulated in the Curriculum Specifications for the English language was used. An independent rater also aided the process of identifying the functions of the modals, particularly those which appear to exhibit functions other than those stipulated in the curriculum specifications. The functions of the modals are categorized and discussed as follows:

- modals of ability
- modals of probability and
- modals of necessity/certainty/obligation

4.2.1 Modals of Ability

The modals of ability is depicted by the modals *can, could* and their negated forms. Table 4 shows the distribution of the modals in the two narrative compositions at the two levels.

The acquisition of modals of ability shows a progression from Form 1 to Form 4 level. At the lower level, *can* has a frequency count of 42. The frequency of use increases at the higher level to 96 at the Form 4 level. The Form 4 level is more than double the Form 1 level. Similarly, the modal *could* shows 29 instances at Form 1 and at the Form 4 level, the figures shot to 146. This would mean that in the narrative compositions produced by the Form Four students, the modal *could* can be found ubiquitously. In fact, the distribution shows that could appeared much more than can which in Form 1 appears in the top spot of most commonly occurring modals. The results indicate that students at the Form 4 level have better acquisition or the knowledge of the modal *could* in a narrative genre and this supports Mindt's (1995) conclusion that the past tense form modal is more common in narrative.

Samples from the Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen (LOB) corpus found a large number of examples that used *could* as ability and in a past-tense narrative (Coates, 1983), and this is similar to the sample from the EMAS Corpus, where *could* was found to be used mostly to refer to ability in the past. The functions of the modal *can* as stipulated by the CDC (MoE, 2002) are ability, possibility and permission. However, the functions depicted by the modals used are more for ability than possibility or for permission.

4.2.2 Modals of Probability

Table 5 shows modals for probability and their distribution in the two narrative compositions. The modals that appeared in bold are not part of the KBSR/KBSM syllabus.

Modals of probability include *will, would, may, might and shall* and their negated forms. They also necessarily indicate a future event. The probability of the future event ranges from certainty to probability. Therefore, *will* indicates the certainty of an event happening and the other modals a probability. Further, the past tense forms of the modals (*would, might, should*) indicate events that are less certain to happen than the present tense forms (*will, may, shall*). Similarly, Mindt (1995) suggested that there are three prominent meanings of the modal *will* and they are certainty/prediction, volition/intention and possibility/high possibility.

The figures in table 5 show an increase in the number of modals of probability from Form 1 to Form 4. The modal *will* and its negated form show the highest number of occurrences at the two levels, with the Form Four subjects showing the higher usage of the modal. Examples of *will* that depicts the range of probability function are as shown below:

1. "…otherwise I *will* feel guilty" (SMPM-P-f1-06.32)
2. "Susan *will* also be discharged…" (SMPM-P-f1-06.11)
3. "They were planning something to do which *will* make them happy…." (SMTI-P-f4-03.2)
4. "She *will* be fine" (SMTA-P-f4-0435)

The modal *would,* however, which is not taught to the students also showed quite a high occurrence in the search with a total of 65 instances across the two educational levels (Table 5). The narrative compositions at the Form 4 level showed a high frequency of use of this modal, with 56 occurrences, a big jump from 9 at the Form 1 level, which means an increase of almost 600 percent. By comparing percentage increases, it would seem that the increase in the use of *would* is much more prominent than *will* at 400%. This indicates students' knowledge and competence in indicating probability by explicitly using both *will* and *would*. Some examples of sentences with the use of modals of probability *would* are as shown below:

1. "She *would be* dead" (SMHK-P-f1-02.12), and
2. "I was afraid that I *would lose* Susan" (SMPM-P-f1-06.18)
3. "The boy suggested he *would perform* CPR" (SMPM-P-f1-06.19)
4. "…I felt it *would be funny* to scare her" (SMTA-P-f4-01.23)

The examples above are narrative in genre and support Mindt's (1995) argument that in most instances the modal *would* has past time orientation and is most prominent in narration.

On the other hand, the occurrence of the probability modals *may, might* and *shall* is minimal in use. It was found that the modal *may* for probability totaled to 8 instances across the two levels; one instance at Form 1 level, and 7 instances at Form 4 level. This is not unexpected as Longman Spoken and Written English (LSWE) Corpus states that may is actually rarely used to indicate probability, and in cases where there is a need to indicate permission, the modal *can* is always more preferred than *may (*Biber et al., 2002). In addition*, may* has a pragmatic function, that of politeness, which may not be perceived by the Malay students because it is culture-specific. This function is also often indicated by the modal *can* (as in "*Can* I have some sugar?" as opposed to "*May* I have some sugar?").

The modal *might*, on the other hand, for probability was not found at Form 1 level but only at the Form 4 level with 6 instances. The examples below are samples with both these modals from the narrative compositions, which show the functions of possibility/probability:

1. "I *may* bleed but I *will make* her my girlfriend"
2. "…she *might* fell into the lake…."*
3. "…and *may* be Ali not here…."

Shall was used the least in the narrative compositions where the search identified the use at the Form 4 level with 3 instances.

4.2.3 Modals of Necessity/Certainty/Obligation

The modals categorised as modals of necessity and obligation include *should, must, have to/had to and need to.* Table 6 shows the count of the modals of necessity/obligation.

Out of the four modals of necessity/obligation, *must* appears to be used the most with 24 instances across the two levels; 2 occurrences at the Form 1 level and 22 instances at the Form 4 level. Some examples of sentences where must occur are given below:

1. "We *must* do that because it was very important (SMSAB-P-f1-05)
2. "Jong Lik…he *must* rescue the girl (SMPM-P-f4-06.32)
3. "The doctor told me that Jeanne *must* be put into bed and *must rest…"* (SMPM-P-f4-04.32)

Out of the four types of modals of necessity/, *must* shows the highest distribution, particularly at the Form Four level. This points out that to indicate necessity, students prefer to use *must* over all the other modals of the same category. A feasible explanation for this can be offered and that is the influence of the first language. In Bahasa Melayu (Malay Language), the equivalent modal for *must* is *mesti* (Bahiyah and Wijayasuriya, 1998). The Malay word is probably borrowed and adapted from the English language, which accounts for the similarity of the two words. Also, the forms and functions of the words are the same allowing for the ease in the use of *must* in English. Since more than 50% of the students are of the Malay ethnicity, thus they may be familiar with the modal *must*. The results are indicative of this.

The modal *should*, which connotes moral obligation or duty, at its strongest and at its weakest (Coates, 1983) refers to offering advice or giving suggestions. It was minimally used at Form 1 level with only one instance, while at the Form 4 level there were 9 instances of the modal *should.* Grammatically, *should* is the past tense form of *shall*, however, in the search, the former appeared more often than the latter. According to Biber et al. (2002), the modal *should* is more common than *shall*; in fact, the current search found that most of the frequencies of occurrence of the past tense forms are higher than the present tense forms.

The next type of modal found in the narrative compositions is *have to/had to*. The sentences below show examples of have to/had to:

1. "It was really exciting to *have to* go to school by bus…." (SRBL-H-s5-02.7).
2. "My father *had to* stop at the petrol station" (SKABJ-H-s5-10.9)

Need to is another modal found in the search but with only one instance at the Form 1 level and 2 instances at the Form 4 level, and one of the examples is shown below:

"We prepared things that **need to* bring along*" (SMSAB-P-f1-05.2)

The occurrence of *need* in general is rare and there was only one instance of *need* found at the Form 1 level and two at the Form 4 level. In general, students do not seem to prefer to use the modal *need,* even if they do have the knowledge of it.

4.2.4 Summary for Research Question 2

The modals identified in the narrative compositions were the modals stipulated in the KBSR/KBSM syllabus as well as others that were found in the students narrative compositions. Their frequencies of occurrence and the increases from Form 1 to Form Four reflect students' acquired knowledge of modals and their functions. Some modals were not included in the curriculum and some appeared more than others. Botley (e-mail correspondence, 2005) suggests that Malaysian ESL learners have a great tendency to over-use and under-use certain modals and functions. This was found to be true since the students did use the same modals often and others rarely.

The modals stipulated in the syllabus are divided into three categories: modals of ability, modals of probability and modals of necessity/obligation. Table 7 shows that the modal of ability is the most common modal found in the students' essay with a total of 313 occurrences from Form 1 to Form 4.

This suggests that the modals of ability are preferred and used more frequently than the other modals. This is to be expected because the modals *can* and *could* are easier to acquire and use by the students in their writing to indicate ability more than other functions of modality. Also, the most common Malay modal is ***'boleh'*** by observation and by research (Imran Ho, 1993), which is the equivalent modal of can in English.

Bose (2005) states that acquisition of modals can be seen in students' writing and in their ability to construct grammatically and semantically correct sentences. The findings from this study are similar to Bose's study on India's high school students' use of modal verbs in their writings. He concludes that high school students in India are only able to use modals accurately when they have acquired the modal verbs. The investigation carried out in this study points to the same fact: that the students at the higher level were able to choose the modals they have learnt as they progressed in their educational levels and were more certain in using them.

For the modals of probability, the use of *will, would, may* and *might* in the narrative compositions were found to be smaller in number in comparison to the modals for ability. The Curriculum Specifications for English language, however, did not state these as the functions for those modals. Students, however, were competent enough to use these modals in their narrative compositions even though they were not explicitly exposed to them in the classrooms. The modals of necessity/certainty /obligation also appeared to show the same pattern of distribution, as a result of the concordance search. However, this is based on actual counts of modals, keeping in mind that the lack of use does not necessarily indicate that students have not acquired this type of modals. If at all, it would appear that they might have done so based on the high occurrences of the modals of certainty/necessity/obligation at the Form 4 level, which suggests that, at the lower level, the students may be in the process of acquiring the modals, but producing them only at the Form Four level.

The modals taught to the Malaysian ESL learners according to the Curriculum Specifications for English language are *may, must, could, should, will, can, might, need to and have to*. The modals are taught according to their basic respective functions as stated in the KBSR/KBSM syllabus:

1. *may* has the function of asking permission and request
2. *must, will, should, need to and have to* have the function to indicate necessity
3. *can and could* have the function of ability and permission
4. *might* has the function of possibility

(Source: Curriculum Specifications of English Language, CDC (MoE, 2003))

The analysis indicated that the modals frequently used by these students were the modals of ability. These include *can, could* and their negated forms. The findings displayed a progression in the uses of modals of ability across the two educational levels. The other modals showed lower frequencies of use especially modals of probability/possibility.

The results also showed that at the higher level, there were more modals identified in the narrative compositions. Students were more competent to use more modals because language development has taken place and they were more aware of the other modals even though the instances were fewer as compared to the modals of ability. The low occurrences of the modals of probability/possibility and modals of necessity/certainty do not mean that students have not acquired the knowledge but the findings point to the fact that students may have been in the process of acquiring the modals as they move along but were only competent enough to produce the modals at the Form 4 level.

The students at the two levels were able to use the modals stipulated by the syllabus and also those that have not been taught to them. Also, they were able to perceive the conceptual meaning of each modal and their communicative function.

5. Conclusion

This study examined Malaysian ESL learners' use of modals in their written tasks. The constructs under this study were concerns on how well modal verbs are used in their writing. Major conclusions became apparent throughout the findings. The conclusions are basically connected to how Malaysian ESL learners use modal auxiliary in their writing. They are:

1. The most common modals used by the students were the modals of ability that include *can, could* and their negated forms.
2. The present tense modals were most apparent at the lower level than at the higher level indicating students' ability and understanding in using the present tense form.
3. At the higher level past tense forms are more dominant showing that students have the ability to understand the concept of narration, where the past tense form is preferred.
4. Students were able to use modals that are not stipulated in the syllabus (*would* and *shall*), thus indicating learning of the modal auxiliary does not only happen in the classrooms.
5. It was also found that students had difficulty in deciding on the appropriate modals with the respective appropriate functions. Modals of probability and modals of necessity/certainty and obligation were minimally used.
6. Textbook writers need to be in line with the English language syllabus so that the necessary modals will be stated in the syllabus. What appeared in the syllabus should be similar to the content of textbooks so that no confusion will arise among the students. Two modals in particular are *would* and *shall*, which were mentioned in most grammar books as central modals or modal verbs but are not stipulated in the syllabus. However, these two modals did appear in the students' writing.

5.1 Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed that could be made in the learning and teaching of modal verbs:

1. All the nine central modals must be introduced and repetitively taught to enhance students' understanding. Introducing modals according to function is an appropriate method of introduction. Drilling is one method that could be used so that students can see the usage and be able to use the modals well.
2. Teachers must consider teaching modals in a structured way to enhance understanding. The findings have shown that modals are acquired by students not only in the classroom but also elsewhere. However, it was found that the modals of ability were used the most by the students even though it is only introduced at the Form 2 level.
3. The modals *would* and *shall* must be incorporated into the syllabus since the usage was found in the students' writing. These modals were also identified in textbooks used by the students with explanation of usage, thus, it should be part of the syllabus since other grammatical items also require the use of would (conditional structures, for example) in the structures.
4. Teaching students forms and functions of linguistic items must be continued and reinforced so that students will get sufficient exercises that will enable them to practice and understand usage of modals and their functions. Ideally, which modal to be taught first would depend on the order of acquisition. The findings showed that students were more familiar with the modals of ability, and this was shown by the high frequency of *can* at the lower level even though this modal is only taught to the students at the Form 2 level. The modals of probability and the modals of necessity/certainty/obligation were found to have lower frequencies even at the Form 4 level indicating students' lack of competence in using these two modals. Reinforcing and explicit teaching of these two modals may be necessary to increase students' understanding and their ability to use these two modals more.

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Table 1. Frequency Counts of Modal Use in Form 1 Narrative Compositions

Modal	Frequency
1. Can/can't	42
2. Could/couldn't	29
3. Will/won't	29
4. Would/wouldn't	9
5. Have to/had to	4
6. Need to	2
7. Must	2
8. Should/shouldn't	1
9. May/may not	1
Total	119

Table 2. Frequency Counts of Modal Use in Form 4 Narrative Compositions

Modal	Frequency
1. Could/couldn't	146
2. Will/won't	118
3. Can/can't	96
4. Would/wouldn't	56
5. Have to / had to	25
6. Must	22
7. Should/shouldn't	9
8. May/may not	7
9. Might	6
10. Need to	6
11. Shall	3
Total	494

Table 3. Distribution of Modal Use in Both Narrative Compositions

Modals/Level	Form 1		Form 4	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Can/can't	42	35	96	19.4
Could/couldn't	29	24	146	29.6
Will/won't	29	24	118	23.9
would/wouldn't	9	7.6	56	11.3
May/may not	1	0.8	7	1.4
Might	Nil	Nil	6	1.2
Shall	Nil	Nil	3	0.6
Should/shouldn't	1	0.8	9	1.8
Must	2	1.7	22	4.5
Have to/had to	3	3	25	5
Need to/need	2	2.5	6	1.2
Total	118	100	494	100

Table 4. Frequency Counts of Modal of Ability

Modals/Level	Form 1	Form 4	Total
Can/can't	42	96	138
Could/couldn't	29	146	175
Total	71	242	313

Table 5. Frequency Counts of Modal of Probability

Modals/Levels	Form 1	Form 4	Total
Will/won't	29	118	147
Would/wouldn't	9	56	65
May/may not	1	7	8
Might/might not	-	6	6
Shall/shall not	-	3	3
Total	39	190	229

Table 6. Frequency Counts of Modal for Necessity/Certainty/Obligation

Modals/Levels	Form 1	Form 4	Total
Should/should not	1	9	10
Must/must not	2	22	24
Have to/had to	4	12	16
Need to/need not to	1	2	3
Total	8	45	53

Table 7. Aggregated Counts of Modal Use and Function

Modals/Level	Form 1	Form 4
Modals of Ability (Can, could)	71	242
Modals of Probability (will, would, may, might, shall)	39	187
Modals of Necessity/Certainty/Obligation (should, must, have to, need to)	8	45

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A Study of Chinese Undergraduates' MI Distribution in EFL Class

Ning Liu

Department of Foreign Language, Beihang University-Beihai

PO box: No. 88 Silver beach Boulevard Beihai 536000, China

Tel: 86-139-7798-6109 E-mail: lienwuhan@yahoo.com.cn

Abstract

This paper initiates an investigation of the college students' MI (multiple intelligences) distribution in English class. The participants are a group of Chinese sophomores from different majors: city planning, tourism, software engineering, financial administration and arts of English. With a view to make the investigation more specified in students' English learning activities, the paper doesn't use other existing MI scales, but specifies research items on Chinese college students' activities in their EFL (English as a Foreign Language) class. The result reveals students' overall and comparative MI distributions among different majors, which provides English teachers in China with fundamental information about college students' varieties, as well as referential information for English teachers in other EFL countries.

Keywords: MI distribution, EFL, ESL, Chinese undergraduates

1. Introduction

Although MI theory has been widely accepted and applied by educators, there are still some voids which have not been popularly addressed to: 1. The assessment of students' MI distribution in one subject. Since MI assessments usually aim at indentifying students' different preponderate intelligences by observing their different behaviors in different settings, informants are usually asked to indentify their learning habits in different subjects, hobbies in or out of schools, etc., when their MI distributions are assessed. However, this form of assessment may lead to less precise and practical insights than a survey focus on one subject. For instance, a student may write essays better in Chinese than in English, so his or her linguistic intelligence tend to be high in Chinese while low in English; a student who solves mathematic problems quickly and well may feel embarrassed in psychoanalysis in reading a literature. Therefore, an abstract categorizing of students' MI distribution may lead to an untrue hypothesis of students' preponderances in certain activities in one subject, which may confuse teachers from different subjects when MI theory is applied in their teaching; 2. Comparative analyses of students' general MI distribution among different groups. How to incorporate MI in teaching is an important issue whereas no uniform answers have been achieved. As Seidel says, "MI theory raises many questions for classroom practice. Should teachers try to nurture all of the intelligences equally or should they focus on identifying and developing children's strengths? Should schools offer a wider selection of courses or should they maintain a traditional curriculum and provide more varied ways of engaging students in the standard subject matter? It is important to remember that MI is not an end in itself." (Sternberg & Williams, 1998, p. 23) Obviously, every effective teaching has to adapt to the settings. Considering the differences between ESL and EFL environments, any superficial copying of MI-based teaching approach which originates from ESL countries don't always fit EFL classes. Chinese EFL classes are usually characterized by their students' big-sized number, similar educational background and same mother tongues. Although student-centered English teaching are encouraged, teacher-centered teaching is still prevailing due to the environmental limitations in China. Obviously, a comparative analyze of students' overall MI distributions among different groups provides more practical references to teachers than analysis of students' individual MI distributions.

From the author's personal teaching experience, Chinese undergraduate students from different majors are usually various in their performances when taking part in English activities. It goes without saying that English students are usually most active since they usually have more chances to contact the target language, while there are apparently differences among students from other majors. With the hypothesis that different majored students usually have overall MI distributions of their own, this paper had an MI survey among a group of Chinese undergraduates from different majors. As a MI scale based on one subject is scarcely found, this paper redesigned a scale, all the research items in which are related to subjects' real EFL activities in class.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1 MI Theory

Linguistic and Mathematic intelligences were traditional admitted intelligences which were therefore widely assessed, and always being the criterions of whether a student is eligible or not. These criterions have been influencing teachers of different subjects for many years, so do English teachers. English teachers may regard a student who can't read, discuss, or write in English as an ineligible student. While of course, these skills are very crucial in English learning since English is mainly a communication tool, EFL teachers scarcely notice students' other preponderate intelligences, and these other intelligences may be used to arouse students' interest or to improve their ability in communication. Gardner divided people's intelligence into 8 genres: verbal/linguistic intelligence, logical/mathematical intelligence, visual/spatial intelligence, bodily/kinesthetic intelligence, musical/rhythmic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, naturalistic intelligence. (Stanford, 2003, p. 1) This division challenges teachers' traditional attitudes towards teaching. Traditionally, teachers lay stress on choosing teaching materials, or on designing teaching procedures. However, less emphasis is put on students' varieties. Naturally, a series of educational reforms followed the propounding of the theory. As it was described in *Creativity and Development*, "From its introduction in 1983, the impact of Howard Gardner's *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* has seemed to increase with each passing year. By this point in its history, there are thousands of schools that claim to use multiple intelligences (MI) theory in planning their curricula, evaluation, and/or instructional approach, and hundreds of books and guides about how to implement the theory. In a limited Internet search in 2002, more than 100,000 sites were identified as MI-theory relevant. Clearly, MI theory has established a major beachhead in the fields of educational theory, policy, and practice." (Sawyer, Steiner, Moran, Sternberg, Feldman, Nakamura, et al., 2003, pp. 139-140)

Gardner identified eight criteria to determine whether or not a capacity qualifies as an intelligence: potential of isolation by brain damage, a distinctive developmental history with a definable set of expert, the existence of savants, prodigies, and other exceptional individuals, an identifiable set of core operations or information-processing mechanisms, support from experimental psychological tasks, support from psychometric findings, evolutionary history and evolutionary plausibility, susceptibility to encoding in a symbol system. (Sternberg & Williams, 1998, p. 19) In an other word, any forms of social activities can be grouped into a certain intelligence, as long as it's inherent and can be strengthened through more practice. Obviously, Gardner's criteria provides a potentialities for future research as well as the application. As Martinez says, "In a considerable break from past epistemologies used to understand intelligence, Gardner conjoined methods and findings from several disciplines to construct a theory that has broadened traditional accounts of what constitutes intelligence." (Martinez, 2000, p. 34) According to Gardener, the current categorization of MI may be expanded as long as more groups of activities are identified, that's why his original seven categorizations of multiple intelligences can be expanded to eight ones. As a result, every teacher may turn to realize that students' different activities in or out of class are to be regarded as a form of intelligence, and may turn to think how to incorporate it in his or her teaching. In fact, many scholars have their understanding of multiple intelligences from different aspects. Checkley gives his definitions as follows: Linguistic intelligence is the capacity to use language, your native language, and perhaps other languages, to express what's on your mind and to understand other people; people with a highly developed logical-mathematical intelligence understand the underlying principles of some kind of a causal system; spatial intelligence refers to the ability to represent the spatial world internally in your mind; spatial intelligence can be used in the arts or in the sciences; certain sciences like anatomy or topology emphasize spatial intelligence; bodily kinesthetic intelligence is the capacity to use your whole body or parts of your body--your hand, your fingers, your arms--to solve a problem, make something, or put on some kind of a production; musical intelligence is the capacity to think in music, to be able to hear patterns, recognize them, remember them, and perhaps manipulate them; interpersonal intelligence is understanding other people; intrapersonal intelligence refers to having an understanding of yourself, of knowing who you are, what you can do, what you want to do, how you react to things, which things to avoid, and which things to gravitate toward; naturalist intelligence designates the human ability to discriminate among living things (plants, animals) as well as sensitivity to other features of the natural world (clouds, rock configurations). (Fasko, 2001, p. 1) Nolen's description also reveals that students with different preponderant intelligences will perform differently in certain activities. "People with verbal / linguistic intelligence tend to think in words and have highly developed auditory skills. They have great ability to use words with clarity. Those with musical / rhythmic intelligence have a firm understanding of pitch, rhythm, and timbre. Through music, they are able to convey their emotions. People with logical / mathematical intelligence are able to follow long chains of reasoning very skillfully. Visual / spatial intelligence thinkers have the ability to manipulate and create mental images in order to solve problems. People with bodily / kinesthetic intelligence can use their body in very expressive skilled ways for a distinct purpose. Those with interpersonal intelligence are often able to understand, perceive and discriminate between people's moods, feelings, motives, and intelligences. Comparatively, intrapersonal intelligence thinkers deal more with the individual self, they have the ability to know oneself and to understand one's own inner workings. People with naturalistic intelligence often show expertise in the recognition and classification of plants and animals." (Nolen, 2003, p. 1) Reflecting on EFL teaching in Chinese universities, students show various interests and performances in the class. Some students show better talents in giving presentations, some students pay close attention to reading or listening strategies, some others like to watch American movies. Obviously, understanding students' MI distribution in EFL classes will help teachers teach better.

2.2 MI Assessment

Because, according to MI theory, intelligences are potentials exercised only in the context of certain experiences and environments, it is especially important that classroom assessments be highly contextualized. Separating bits of knowledge from the contexts in which they have meaning, or separating the child from an environment with real problems to solve or materials to work with, is unlikely to demonstrate what a child has learned or can figure out. (Sternberg and Williams, 1998, p. 29) In order to make the assessment contextualized, the research items in this paper are all related to students' daily activities in their EFL class. There are four basic principles for MI assessment: 1. Assessments have to be contextualized in order to be intelligence-fair; 2. Assessments should allow for diverse modes of response or multiple ways to demonstrate understanding; 3. Assessments should help to track the growth over time of children's ability to use their intelligences; 4. Assessment is a fundamental part of the learning process. Through engaging in reflection and self-assessment, students can come to understand their own intelligences and how they work. (Sternberg and Williams, 1998, pp. 29-31) Obviously, an effective MI study should benefit the teaching or studying. Therefore, the author conducted all the EFL activities related to the assessment before doing the survey in order to make the survey more contextualized, and with a view to make the result more insightful for EFL teachers, the paper tries to find out students' overall MI distribution rather than their individual MI distributions, since in EFL countries, teachers can hardly divide students into different groups according to their MI distribution or repeat the same teaching procedure in different ways, because the students' numbers are usually too large and their English classes are quite limited.

Mostly, MI assessments aim at reforming the curriculum systems, such as the MIDAS (Multiple Intelligence Developmental Assessment Scale), however, a MI scale specified in EFL class has never been developed, and MI assessment has never been conducted among Chinese college students.

3. Statement of Purpose

With a view to make the investigation specified to students' performances in EFL class, the author didn't use the popular measuring tools like MIDAS, but redesigned the measuring tool. All the research items are related to students' performances in EFL class.

This paper merits investigation for two reasons: (1). Provides a MI assessment scale specified in EFL class; (2). Investigate the possibility that there exist relations between college students' majors and their MI distribution.

4. Methodology

4.1 Subjects

The research is conducted among 100 sophomores whose majors are city planning, tourism, software engineering, financial administration and arts of English (20 students from each major). Their age structure is from 19 to 22. In BHBH (Beihang University, Beihai), all the students whose majors are not English will have the standard English proficiency test at the end of each semester, and according to the test results, they will be grouped into three different genres of classes: beginning class, average class, advanced class. All the participants whose majors are not English had taken their English proficiency test at the end of last semester and were all grouped into the average classes. Therefore, their English proficiencies are regarded as similar to those of each other.

4.2 Instruments

Two instruments are used in this survey: (1). a questionnaire designed by the author, all the research items are related to students' multiple intelligences in EFL class (2). SPSS 13.0 (Statistical Product and Service Solutions) are used in analyzing the statistics.

The questionnaire comprises of the following research items:

Items 1, 5, 9, 14, 17 are related to students' **musical / rhythmic** intelligences:

1. I have a strong rhythm sensation when reading paralleled sentences. (MR1)

5. I want to read a story about how Beethoven successes. (MR2)

9. I hope the teacher can play some English songs for us during the break. (MR3)

14. I like to read an article accompanied by related background music. (MR4)

17. I wish to have an English singing contest with other students in the class. (MR5)

Items 3, 7, 10, 23, 34 are related to students' **intrapersonal** intelligences:

3. When the English text is close to my real life, it will attract me. (INTRA1)

7. I want the teacher to tell us more practical strategies in learning English. (INTRA2)

10. When my English teacher is correcting my mistakes, I'm fully absorbed. (INTRA3)

23. I like to read English texts related to famous people's biography. (INTRA4)

34. My teachers' encouragement will help me to learn well. (INTRA5)

Items 18, 19, 2, 6, 8 are related to students' **logical / mathematical** intelligences.

18. When my English teacher analyzes the stems, prefixes or suffixes of a word, it's easier for me to memorize it. (LM1)

19. I wish my English teacher can analyze the grammatical rules in the text for us. (LM2)

2. I like to do exercises such as words distinction; they help me to learn in depth. (LM3)

6. I like to write English argumentations. (LM4)

8. Reading strategies, such as the way to guess out the word meaning in a sentence, help me to read efficiently. (LM5)

Items 13, 29, 4, 11, 15 are related to students' **visual / spatial** intelligences.

13. It's easier for me to memorize the new words, phrases or expressions if my English teacher attaches each of them with a picture. (VS1)

29. I like to watch an English movie rather than read a passage. (VS2)

4. When the English text is about the famous resorts in the world, I would be very glad to read it. (VS3)

11. When my English teacher provides me with the framework of a passage, I can understand it better. (VS4)

15. I like to read the English wall papers. (VS5)

Items 12, 39, 16, 20, 35 are related to students' **naturalistic** intelligences.

12. If the words are categorized according to the genres in our real world, I will remember them more easily. (NATUR1)

39. When the English text is related to botanies or animals, I will be interested in reading it. (NATUR2)

16. If our English teacher moves our class out of the classroom, we may learn more efficiently. (NATUR3)

20. I like to listen to English weather reports. (NATUR4)

35. I am sensitive to the words or phrases related to people's facial expressions or gestures. (NATUR5)

Items 21, 22, 36, 40, 24 are related to students' **verbal / linguistic** intelligences:

21. I often imitate the English pronunciation from the tapes or from my English teacher. (VL1)

22. I can make a very good presentation in front of my English teacher and classmates. (VL2)

36. I like to form English sentences verbally or in writing. (VL3)

40. I want to have an English chanting contest in the class. (VL4)

24. I think word explanations in English are more clarifies than those in Chinese. (VL5)

Items 25, 26, 27, 30, 31 are related to students' **interpersonal** intelligences:

25. I like to have a debate with other students in an English class. (INTER1)

26. I use the words or phrases I learned to communicate with others. (INTER2)

27. I like to propose or answer questions in an English class. (INTER3)

30. I like to share my English composition with others in class. (INTER4)

31. Working with my group mates helps me to accomplish my task in class. (INTER5)

Items 28, 32, 33, 37, 38 are related to students' **bodily / kinesthetic** intelligences.

28. I like to have a dictation when I know the words. (BK1)

32. When my English teacher provides me with a writing template, I would like to write a composition in the class. (BK2)

33. I like to use the phrases and expressions that I learned in paper-based translation work. (BK3)

37. I want to play an English drama with my classmates. (BK4)

38. Writing out the words helps me to memorize them easily. (BK5)

Students measure the above statements according to the following standard for evaluation:

1=Mostly Disagree, 2=Slightly Disagree, 3=Not for Sure, 4=Slightly Agree, 5=Mostly Agree

4.3 Procedures

The survey was carried out according to the following procedures:

(1) All the EFL activities listed in the questionnaire are conducted through the subjects during the first half of the semester (the whole semester lasts for 19 weeks);

(2) The questionnaire was experimentally tested among 20 students in the 13th week in the semester.

(3) The research items with low credibility was reformed.

(4) The new questionnaire (see appendix) was filled out by the subjects and collected back by the author during the 15th and 16th week in the semester;

(5) SPSS 13.0 was applied in analyzing the credibility of the results;

(6) Students' MI distributions in different majors are categorized and compared with each other.

4. 4 Analyses

The subjects' overall MI distributions in EFL class were firstly analyzed by SPSS 13.0. The Cronbach Alpha is calculated in order to guarantee the credibility of the study. Means of different research items were then calculated in groups. For example, the means of the five research items related to Musical/Rhythmic Intelligence are calculated as a whole. In this way, students' MI distributions are compared. Then, all the data are separated into 5 groups according to students' different majors, and their means in different intelligences are recalculated in the same way. As a result, their MI distributions among different majored students are analyzed and compared with each other.

5. Results

Table 1 reveals the overall distribution of students' multiple intelligences. The analytical result of SPSS 13.0 shows the Cronbach's Alpha is 0.807, and $P<0.0001$. Therefore, the results of the survey are quite credible. The results show that the most popular EFL activities are related to students' Intrapersonal Intelligence (m=4.286) and Visual/Spatial Intelligence (m=3.848); the least popular EFL activities are related to students' Interpersonal Intelligence (m=3.084) and Verbal/Linguistic Intelligence (m=3.000). (See Table 1)

Table 2 compares different majored students' MI distribution. The results suggest that English students show better Musical/Rhythmic Intelligence (m=3.780) and Bodily/Kinesthetic Intelligence (m=3.780) than other majored students in their EFL class, and they also show better Verbal/Linguistic Intelligence (m=3.340) and Interpersonal Intelligence (m=3.290) than other majored students; Tourism students show strongest Logical/Mathematic Intelligence (m=3.560); Although all the students show strong Intrapersonal Intelligence, city planning students do best of all (m=4.370), and they also show strongest Visual/Spatial Intelligence (m=3.960) and Naturalistic Intelligence (m=3.700). (See Table 2)

6. Discussion

Although students from different majors show different MI distributions, they also have some common grounds. All the students show the strongest Intrapersonal Intelligence and Visual/Spatial Intelligence, while they also show the weakest Verbal/Linguistic Intelligence and Interpersonal Intelligence. Obviously, Chinese college students show strong interests in EFL activities related to their Intrapersonal Intelligence. All the research items related to Intrapersonal Intelligence focus on 3 aspects of the EFL activities: learning strategies, psychological encouragement, and students' reflectively thinking on their own lives. Obviously, students like to learn English with the help of some practical strategies. Most Chinese students lack the environment to use English, and they assess their English abilities by taking exams. Therefore, they learn English mainly for passing important exams. As a result, some strategies which claim to be able to help them memorize more efficiently are usually very popular among the students, and so do the skills in answering English questions. This is actually the reason why there are so many language centers booming up in China, but most of them are teaching students how to memorize words and how to pass the exams. Another unneglectable reason for the above result is that Chinese students usually lack the self-confidence in using English, so teachers' encouragement usually takes effects. The last reason is that Chinese students tend to conduct EFL activities more close to their life. So some ESL (English as a Second Language) activities may turn out to be abortive in EFL class when the situation described in the activities show little resemblance to students' real life. The second strongest intelligence for Chinese undergraduates is their Visual/Spatial Intelligence, which reveals that Chinese students like to learn through intuitional materials, such as English movies, slide shows, and pictures, etc. Because Chinese students scarcely practice their English in face-to-face communications, they show coincident weakness in their Verbal/Linguistic Intelligence and Interpersonal Intelligence in EFL class. It doesn't mean that they don't like to communicate with others in Chinese, but only in English. The scale merits on this point since other forms of MI scales may not detect it. Obviously, English communication is the most crucial ability needed to be strengthened among Chinese undergraduates.

According to Table 2, students of different majors also show different MI distribution in their EFL class:

English students. They have more English classes than other majored students. They perform English dramas, watch English movies, and frequently have English dialogues with foreign teachers from English-speaking countries. As a result, they show very strong Musical/Rhythmic Intelligence, Bodily/Kinesthetic Intelligence, Verbal/Linguistic

Intelligence and Interpersonal Intelligence.

Tourism students. They are the second group which cries for English in their future jobs except for English students. Therefore, they also work hard in English. Since the research items for Logical/Mathematic Intelligence are mainly related to strategies or skills in English learning, such as the memorizing skills for English words, the result suggests that Tourism students learn English in different ways comparing with those of English students. English students may regard practice in English using as the most efficient way in memorizing those words, phrases, or structures, because they have more chances in doing that; however, Tourism students don't have that many chances in using English everyday, they have to turn to learning strategies which help them learn more efficiently. It also represents the situation of many other majored students who wants to learn English well or to pass important English exams.

City Planning students. They have many chances to make model sets of the city, they learn painting, they learn knowledge about plants and animals, and they frequently go to landscape gardens to see plants by themselves. As a result, they show very strong Visual/Spatial Intelligence and Naturalistic Intelligence. And they also show strongest Intrapersonal Intelligence among different majored students. Since the research items for Intrapersonal Intelligence are mainly related to students' reflectively thinking in EFL class, the result suggests that City Planning students are more likely to learn materials or participate in activities close to their real life.

7. Implications

The overall and separate MI distributions among Chinese undergraduates from different majors indicate that some of the EFL activities which require students to play the drama may receive non-ideal effects among non-English majored students. However, the study also indicates that students' intelligence can be improved when they have more opportunities to practice it. That's the reason why different majored students have different MI distributions. Therefore, English teachers in EFL environment need to insist on providing students with various opportunities in English communication, although it may not do the need at first.

According to the study, EFL activities related to Intrapersonal Intelligence and Visual/Spatial Intelligence are the most popular among all Chinese undergraduates. With a view to arouse students' interests in participating into EFL class, English teachers need to use materials more close to students' life, and present the material in more intuitional ways.

Students of different majors show different MI distributions, so English teachers are to flexibly use their teaching approaches when facing different students.

Generally speaking, English teachers in EFL class are challenged by students who tend to learn in different ways from those of ESL students, so the teachers have to reconsider the teaching procedures in every aspect.

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Table 1. Students' Overall MI Distribution (n=100)

Multiple Intelligences	Means	Standard Deviation
Musical/Rhythmic Intelligence	3.634	0.451
Logical/Mathematic Intelligence	3.452	0.568
Intrapersonal Intelligence	4.286	0.423
Visual/Spatial Intelligence	3.848	0.513
Naturalistic Intelligence	3.460	0.622
Verbal/Linguistic Intelligence	3.000	0.767
Interpersonal Intelligence	3.084	0.700
Bodily/Kinesthetic Intelligence	3.622	0.598

(α=0.807, p<0.0001)

Table 2. Comparative Analyses of Different Majored Students' MI Distribution (n=100)

Multiple Intelligences	Students from Different Majors	Means	Standard Deviation
Musical/Rhythmic Intelligence	City Planning	3.620	0.405
	Financial Administration	3.410	0.447
	Software Engineering	3.640	0.467
	Tourism	3.720	0.585
	English	3.780	0.569
Logical/Mathematic Intelligence	City Planning	3.460	0.578
	Financial Administration	3.380	0.591
	Software Engineering	3.340	0.723
	Tourism	3.560	0.433
	English	3.520	0.500
Intrapersonal Intelligence	City Planning	4.370	0.313
	Financial Administration	4.270	0.345
	Software Engineering	4.310	0.607
	Tourism	4.250	0.485
	English	4.230	0.313
Visual/Spatial Intelligence	City Planning	3.960	0.462
	Financial Administration	3.800	0.523
	Software Engineering	3.870	0.650
	Tourism	3.750	0.510
	English	3.860	0.416
Naturalistic Intelligence	City Planning	3.700	0.637
	Financial Administration	3.290	0.537
	Software Engineering	3.450	0.689
	Tourism	3.410	0.529
	English	3.450	0.689
Verbal/Linguistic Intelligence	City Planning	2.810	0.670
	Financial Administration	2.760	0.611
	Software Engineering	3.310	0.835
	Tourism	2.780	0.826
	English	3.340	0.702
Interpersonal Intelligence	City Planning	3.060	0.633
	Financial Administration	2.930	0.555
	Software Engineering	3.200	0.808
	Tourism	2.940	0.749
	English	3.290	0.724
Bodily/Kinesthetic Intelligence	City Planning	3.680	0.521
	Financial Administration	3.520	0.634
	Software Engineering	3.610	0.738
	Tourism	3.520	0.650
	English	3.780	0.425

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Influence of Planning on Students' Language Performance in Task-based Language Teaching

Yingli Wang
College of Foreign Languages, Hebei Polytechnic University
Tangshan 063000, China
Tel: 86-136-1315-0858 E-mail: carolwylwylwyl@163.com

Abstract

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is an important second language teaching method. Planning is one of the significant factors in the studies of TBLT. This paper will mainly discuss the influence of planning on students' language performance in TBLT.

Keywords: Task-based language teaching, Planning, Language performance

1. Introduction

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is a realization of communicative language teaching. It has received much attention from second language acquisition (SLA) researchers and L2 teachers. They provide many definitions of task. Planning and its influence in task-based language performance are also extensively studied in the literature. This paper will focus on the planning in task-based teaching. I will firstly review some of the understandings of task which is the key term in TBLT. Then I will discuss planning in TBLT and thirdly I will explain a set of measurements for students' language performances adopted in this paper. Fourthly I will review research studies concerning the influence of planning on students' language performances in TBLT. At the same time as reviewing, I will make some comments on the literatures in order to show the gaps in the previous studies.

2. Understanding of Task

In the early 1980s, influenced by Widdowson's (1978) assumption about developing capacity to express meaning, many books about communicative activities were published in the United Kingdom (Tomlinson, 1998).

Today task replacing communicative activity is frequently used in SLA and second language teaching (Rubdy, 1998). There are different definitions of task because it has been examined from different perspectives. Here I would like to review some definitions generally grouped into two categories: real world tasks and classroom learning tasks.

Real world task definition has no specific attention on language outcomes. Long (1985) defined it as "a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward" (p.89). More definitions are about classroom learning. Breen (1987) understands task as "a range of workplans" (p.23). Nunan's (1989) view on task is commonly cited, which is "a piece of classroom work" involving "learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language" (p.10). Skehan (1998a) analyzed many understandings of task and outlined four defining criteria.

1. meaning is primary;
2. there is a goal which needs to be worked towards;
3. the activity is outcome-evaluated;
4. there is a real-world relationship (p.268).

Recently, Ellis (2003) raises an updated definition, which covers Skehan's (1998a) four criteria and adds that "a task is a workplan" requiring learners' cognitive processes.

Although these definitions of task are various, they have some points in agreement. A classroom task is an activity with a specific goal and involves communicative language use in the process. Task goes beyond the common classroom exercise because task has a certain relationship with the real-world. The kind of discourse that arises from task is intended to resemble that which occurs naturally in the real world (Ellis, 2000).

3. Explanation of Planning

Planning for TBLT could happen in different levels, such as linguistic elements plan (e.g. choice of words or phrases), sentences plan, structure plan (Clark and Clark, 1977). Ellis (2005) identifies the principal types of task planning, which seems based on general acceptance. Planning in task-based learning and teaching can be cataloged into two kinds: pre-task planning and within-task planning. Pre-task planning includes rehearsal and strategic planning. Rehearsal refers to the fact that students are given a chance to perform the task before the formal performance of the task. It involves task repetition as the first time performance is viewed as preparation for the later performance. Strategic planning refers to students' preparation of what the content is and how the content is expressed for the task. Within-task planning could be further divided into pressured or unpressured. It is grouped according to the time given to students to prepare. In an unpressured planning, students can have a careful plan on their performance of the task. In a pressured planning, students need to rapidly prepare their performance. There is a problem with the division of the within-task planning in my opinion. Ellis (2005) said that "within-task planning can be differentiated according to the extent to which the task performance is pressured or unpressured" (p.4). But he does not make clear the distinction between pressured planning and unpressured planning. In my opinion, the distinction between pressure and unpressure lies in the specific learner's psychological reflection to the tasks. So it is hard to identify the distinction.

4. Measurements for students' language performances

The general goal of foreign language learning, as Han (2004) suggests, is the effective use of target language. Skehan (1998b) proposed to separate learner's general goal into three specific areas: accuracy, complexity and fluency. Accuracy relates to learner's understanding of the rules and the capability to perform against these rules. Complexity deals with the restructuring interlanguage system to become more elaborate and structured. Fluency basically refers to the capability to "mobilize" (p.46) the learner's current linguistic sources to effectively communicate in real time. Skehan also suggested that learners' language performances vary in these areas. These measurements cover both speaking and writing skills. I think it is necessary to set up the separate measurements for speaking and writing within those three areas because of the cognitive and contextual differences in speaking and writing. However, they will not be the focus of the literature review. Yet the separation of performance measurements would result in regrouping these study results in literature review.

5. Review of previous research about influence of planning on students' language performances

Much research has been produced to examine the influence of planning on students' language performance in task-based teaching. I will review some of them in the groups of pre-task planning and within-task planning.

5.1 Pre-task planning

5.1.1 Rehearsal

The results of these pieces of research show that rehearsal has positive influence on students' language performance. Bygate (1996) made a comparison of a student's retelling of the same story in two times and found that rehearsal increased complexity of the performance. Bygate (2001) did a larger study on the influence of practicing a type of task on second time performance and on performance of another new task of this type. It was proved that practice led to greater fluency and complexity of performance on the same task, but it did not help with performance of another task of the same type. Lynch and McLean (2000; 2001) made a study and showed that recycling output enhanced accuracy and fluency. Nemeth and Kormos (2001) found that repeating an argumentation task increased the number of supports provided by the students for their statements. More studies about the influence of rehearsal on the performance of a new task of the same type are necessary. Repeating the same task is not realistic in L2 teaching context. Whether there is a transferring effect of planning from a task to another task of the same type worth future research. Besides, there is no research focusing on how long the influence of rehearsal or repetition can last in students' performances.

5.1.2 Strategic planning

Strategic planning has been extensively studied and its influence on the three areas of students' language performance (i.e. fluency, accuracy, and complexity) has been found.

Results of some studies show that strategic planning enhances fluency. Foster (1996), Foster and Skehan (1996), and Skehan and Foster (1997) reported that planners had greater fluency than non-planners. Ortega (1999) showed that L2 Spanish students had faster speaking speed if they had planned strategically. Wendel (1997, in Ellis, 2005) found that the planner produced more syllables in a certain period of time and less pauses in two narrative tasks. Yuan and Ellis (2003) also discussed the influence of strategic planning on fluency.

However, results of studies I reviewed do not show the influence of strategic planning on accuracy very clearly. Ellis (1987) suggested that planning helped students use regular past tense correctly. Mehnert's (1998) study showed the difference in accuracy of the students with 1-minute planning and the students without planning. But Yuan and Ellis (2003) did not show any influence of strategic planning on accuracy in their study. Some other studies supported that strategic planning influenced students' language performance only to some extent. Ortega (1999) provided a mixed finding, which was that planning enhanced accuracy in the aspect of Spanish noun-modifier agreement but not in the use of articles. Foster and Skehan (1996) showed that the type of task influenced the effect of planning on accuracy. Planned students had greater accuracy than the non-planned in the decision making task, but no evidence showed the effect of planning on accuracy in the narrative task. Foster and Skehan (1999) found that when planning was teacher-guided, its influence on accuracy was greatest, but directing of focus-on-form had no influence on accuracy.

The results of studies about the positive influence of strategic planning on complexity are clear. Crookes (1989) showed that 10- minute planned students had more complex sentences and a broader lexical range. Foster and Skehan (1996) found that planners could use more subordination. Skehan and Foster (1997) suggested that planning led to greater accuracy or complexity, and complexity and accuracy were trade-off. Mehnert (1998) showed the positive influence on 10-minute planners' complexity of performance. The 1-minute and 5-minute planners' complexity performance stayed the same level as the non-planners. Foster and Skehan (1999), Yuan and Ellis (2003) also found that strategic planning had a positive influence on complexity.

5.2 Within-task planning

5.2.1 Unpressured within-task planning

Unpressured within-task planning positively influences students' accuracy of performance. There are three studies on this topic. Hulstijn and Hulstijn (1984) did a study on L2 Dutch students. They were asked to perform short oral narrative tasks in four learning conditions with interactive combination of two variables: time (students were asked to speak as fast as possible or to task as much time as they like) and guided attention (students were directed to focus on form or meaning). They found that time itself did not influence the accuracy of word order, but in the condition of guided attention to focus on form the influence of time is evident. That is to say, if students use the time on the consideration of structure or grammar, their performances are more accurate. If they use the time on the consideration of content, there is no influence of time on accuracy. Ellis (1987) compared learners' performance oral and written tasks in three conditions. In the study, firstly the students were asked to write a narrative given as much time as they wanted. Secondly the students were asked to retell the same narrative without reference to the written ones. Thirdly the students were asked to tell a story according to a picture given to them and with possible least chance to prior-planning. So the three conditions were like this: the first task had online planning and pre-task planning. The second task had no online planning but pre-task planning. The third task had no online planning or pre-task planning. Ellis found that students used regular past tense forms most accurately in task 1, least accurately in task 3 and the task 2 was in the middle. Ellis explained that the performance difference between task 1 and task 2 was because of whether there was the online planning. Crookes' (1989) comments informed us that different performance between task 1 and 2 also could be because of the task types (task 1 was a written task but task 2 was an oral task.).

5.2.2 Pressured within-task planning

Tests are the typical pressured contexts in which L2 performance is mentioned. The study about the influence of planning on students' language performance of tasks in tests has great significance. The findings are useful for tests designing and evaluation. I review two studies here.

Wigglesworth (1997) produced a study, in which 107 adult ESL learners were asked to perform five tasks of the Australian Assessment of Communicative Skills test in planned and unplanned conditions. Performances of 28 learners were analyzed against the measures of complexity, fluency and accuracy. The findings showed that there were obvious differences in learners' performances between planned and unplanned conditions, especially for the high-proficiency learners and in the task with a high cognitive load. Elder and Mcnamara (2002) examined the effect of 3-minute planning on task performance of 201 ESL students. They found no obvious effect on task performance.

Planning in tests might have positive influence on students' language performance but there are not enough studies to prove it. Besides, when the influence of planning in pressured and unpressured contexts is examined, students' psychological dimensions need to be considered.

6. Conclusion

Task is the key term in TBLT. It is necessary to make a clear understanding of it before examining into any specific areas in TBLT. Although there are many different understandings of task, some agreements are achieved. In TBLT, planning is a key element, and students' language performances are measured from the aspects of complexity, accuracy and fluency. The influence of planning on students' language performance is mainly examined in the literature. Pre-task planning has positive influence on students' language performances. However, the influence of strategic planning on accuracy is not very clearly. Unpressured within-task planning positively influences students' accuracy of performance. Planning in tests might have positive influence on students' language performance but there are not enough studies to prove it. Some critical comments are provided as the literature is reviewed.

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Challenges Faced and the Strategies Adopted by a Malaysian English Language Teacher during Teaching Practice

Muhammad Kamarul Kabilan (Corresponding author)
School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia
11800 Penang, Malaysia
Tel: 60-4-653-2966 E-mail: kabilan@usm.my

Raja Ida Raja Izzaham
School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia
11800 Penang, Malaysia
Tel: 60-4-653-2966 E-mail: ida@edutrend.com.my

Abstract

In this paper, the reflections on distinct and crucial teaching practices of a pre-service English language teacher are presented and examined. The focus of this paper is on three aspects of class teaching that the teacher found presented a challenge during her teaching practice. For each aspect, the nature of the difficulties and the challenges are described and deciphered. In addition, various strategies that the teacher explored and experimented in order to meet those challenges are outlined and elucidated in terms of their effectiveness. This process is interwoven with the nurturing of pedagogical knowledge of the teacher, which is developed from her reflective practices. This paper also highlights some of the teacher's plans and thoughts on dealing with those challenges in the future. Implications for teaching practice are also discussed.

Keywords: Challenges during teaching practice, Pedagogical knowledge, Reflective practices.

1. Introduction

Kennedy (1996) advocates that at some point of their training, pre-service teachers must be able to express their personal educational philosophies, theories and understandings. Teaching practice, notwithstanding the length or duration, is an excellent opportunity for pre-service teachers to experiment and test their knowledge and skills in an authentic teaching and learning environment in tandem with own understanding of their personal educational philosophies and theories. In the words of Davis and Hall (2003), it is "a socializing experience into the teaching profession" (p. 2). Nevertheless, such rigorous negotiations during teaching practice essentially leads to higher confidence in improving pre-service teachers' learning, satisfaction with their teaching career, and a higher sense of teacher efficacy (Oh et al., 2005). As such, pre-service teachers must question their beliefs and assumptions in developing pedagogical knowledge during teaching practice to avoid practices that are not founded on effective and critical pedagogical knowledge and theories. The understanding for this can be drawn from Schön's (1983) argument that in the profession of teaching, the theoretical facets are embedded in and inseparable from practice.

Many recent studies on teaching practice quite extensively focus on the challenges faced by English language pre-service teachers and how they affect numerous aspects of teacher education. For example, Thomas (2006) highlights the language, cultural (diversity) and environmental barriers experienced by four American pre-service teachers in Central Asia and how they coped and successfully managed in gaining valuable experience during their teaching practice. Pomeranntz and Pierce (2004) lead an inquiry into the challenges experienced by pre-service teachers in the "real world", and to what degree the "courses prepared them for those challenges" (p. 55). These acts of rethinking and re-examining the challenges actually allow the 'knitting' of new knowledge and reconstructing of existing knowledge through various conciliation processes of solving problems and difficulties during teaching practice. Chung (2002) examines the challenges of developing effective teaching strategies of pre-service teachers through quality feedback from supervisors. She concludes that the dialogues that they have facilitate knowledge building and encourage collaborative (between supervisor as an expert and pre-service teacher as a novice) reflection on individual teaching practice to improve the understanding of teaching. By using such dialogues, Chung (2000) insists that supervisors are able to assist the novice teachers in identifying and evaluating "the context of the problem or deficiency and establish developmental goals or standards" and "the personal strengths and resources of the student-teacher may be used to improve plans for teaching" (p. 10). And the possibility of improving teaching is enormous in terms of the various innovative ways and situations in which new knowledge can be produced, constructed and reconstructed, and refined for positive, meaningful learning experiences (Kabilan, 2005).

With the new knowledge gained and the reconstruction of existing knowledge, the teachers have the potentials and the power to be adept in confronting the challenges and eventually prevailing over them. And as for teacher education providers, it may assist in improving teacher preparation courses (Pomerantz & Pierce, 2004). A recent nationwide evaluation study of teaching practice in the Malaysian teacher education program seriously suggests that it is very important and beneficial to identify and examine the challenges that the pre-service teachers face during their teaching practice (IPT, BPG & MOE, 2005). The study contends that findings from such an investigation can enrich and improve the effectiveness of teacher education programs in Malaysia, particularly the teaching practice component. And in this respect, many teacher education institutions in Malaysia aspire to provide effective and meaningful experiences for future English language teachers (Kabilan, 2007), especially the teaching practice component, which has always been a focus of these institutions.

However, local studies in Malaysia have highlighted numerous difficulties and problems faced by the pre-service teachers during their teaching practices. Hanifah (2004) for instance, find that pre-service teachers seldom question their assumptions and beliefs they developed during teaching practice in school. A study by Toh (2002) on Malaysian pre-service teachers' educational beliefs during teaching practice locates that pre-service teachers become less student-centered and more teacher-oriented in their educational beliefs. Ong et al.'s (2004) study, though discovers many positive aspects of teaching practice of primary teachers of ELT, highlights too a very disturbing trend – almost 55% of the pre-service teachers find that their teaching practice failed to give them the opportunities to engage in theory and practice because the teachers are overwhelmed by the realities of the classrooms. Ong et al.'s (2004) also identifies five challenges that burdens the pre-service teachers – supervision, environment, workload, pedagogical knowledge and content knowledge – but never probes into the strategies adopted by the teachers to overcome those challenges, implying perhaps the pre-service teachers were never given the chance to reflect upon the strategies that they drew upon to confront those challenges. If the pre-service teachers' challenges and strategies adopted during teaching practice are understood clearer, teacher educators would be able to supervise the pre-service teachers in a more meaningful and effectual manner, where the educators could specify which strategies are more appropriate in which conditions. Hence, this paper attempts to explore and understand the challenges and difficulties that beleaguered a Malaysian pre-service teacher of ELT during her teaching practice, and the strategies she employed to overcome those challenges and difficulties.

2. Method

In identifying the reasons of choosing a practice and decisiveness in respect of the challenges faced and strategies chosen, we need to understand the teachers' belief systems and their educational perspectives and theories. In ensuring the study would be to identify critical and unique challenges that can be linked to the ELT pre-service teacher's teaching practice in a non-native setting, Chung's (2002) suggestion to focus on specific problems was espoused. This assisted us to arrive at a decision to limit the identification and exploration of challenges to just three. Such limitation ensures that the teacher can meticulously and comprehensively examine each challenge, and ensure the strategies used are exhaustively tried, tested and explained.

The teacher, Aida, a 24-year old female Malay teacher, was placed in a sub-urban school, teaching English to lower secondary students (with an average age of 14). She was asked to identify and concentrate on three major challenges that she would face during her teaching practice, and elaborate them in terms of the nature of the challenges, and how they affected her practices of teaching and learning in classroom settings. She was given the total freedom in determining the three challenges. She was asked to outline and elucidate the various strategies that she explored and experimented with in order to meet those three challenges. At the end of the teaching practice, which lasted for almost three months, she was required to submit a reflective-report of what she experienced.

The reflective report was the primary source of data for this paper. A series of brief interviews with Aida were also conducted after the reflective journal was submitted to assist us in comprehending, confirming and elucidating the reflective narratives (Narratives from the interviews are referred to as 'Interview 1', 'Interview 2', etc.). Other narratives or excerpts are from the Reflective Report.

The interview also functioned as a tool to cross-check the reliability and validity of the content and reflections of teachers' reflective-report. And in terms of data analysis, a simple tool of coding strategies was used. Coding strategies are the means of sorting the descriptive data collected so that the material bearing on a given topic could be physically separated from other data. For the purpose of this study, the coding was based on "situation codes" and "activity codes". The situation codes' aim was to place units of data that described how Aida defined, perceived and connected the teaching strategies she developed to her classroom practices in overcoming the challenges in an English language classroom. For activity codes, they were directed at identifying and understanding Aids's regularly occurring kinds of behaviour i.e. the teaching strategies and actions that were planned and put into practice by Aida (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Schemas, such as Table 1, were used to identify the challenges and strategies used and, code, arrange and organize the data.

3. Findings

In the following section, three difficulties, which Aida found most challenging in this period of her teaching experience, are depicted. It is, however, crucial to stress before further elucidation that although some of the difficulties outlined will be common to many, what Aida experienced was, to a large extent, personal to her and her teaching milieu in the Malaysian context. Nevertheless, there are many learning opportunities and sharing of ideas and experiences for other beginning English language teachers in similar predicaments, which we will underscore from time to time. These prospects could easily allow them to make sense and meaning of personal teaching ideas in relation to others' experiences, and discern how the senses and meanings constructed could assist in their own teaching-learning engagements. In general, Aida was faced with three main challenges – mixed ability class, use of mother tongue and expectations of teacher centredness.

3.1 Mixed ability

During the teaching practice, Aida faces an extremely huge challenge as a beginning teacher – a large class of students with mixed levels of abilities. Aida relates,

The reality of teaching a class of 40-50 students is, already on its own, a difficult endeavour. Add to it the fact that the 40-50 students in your class have their own individualistic levels of abilities and you would have a situation that is almost impossible to surmount. This is the first of my three challenges-teaching a class of individuals who fell into many bands of abilities and trying to effect a teaching situation which would be meaningful and beneficial to every individual student and their level of ability.

Teaching students of mixed levels of abilities is a real and genuine problem that teachers face, one that also needs serious attention from professionals in ELT (Hedge, 2000), and one that is literally impossible to solve (Rose, 1997). According to Aida, one of the factors that made the above situation a real challenge is the fact that there were "many bands of abilities and that the students were very widely distributed along the line; some being at the very top-upper intermediate and some at the very bottom-elementary whilst others were widely distributed between these two extremes" (Interview 3). She construes that "although there were differing levels of abilities, the actual ranges were not wide and were more evenly distributed" (Interview 3).

Aida relies on her previous knowledge to guide her and develop effectual strategies that are based on informed ideas and pedagogical ideas to address the challenge of mixed ability classes. She elaborates in great detail justifying each decision with sound pedagogical knowledge and ideas:

Having the experience of that first teaching practice was not, however, only a negative point. It also became for me an experience from which I could draw upon in order to surmount this challenge. Therefore, my main strategy, like previously, was to effect lessons timed and paced on a middle ground so as not to intimidate the lower level ability students and at the same time, not to hold back the students with the higher level of ability. It was not easy to find a middle ground even with the experience that I had garnered before as the levels in ability were far more far-ranging and the students themselves were totally different individuals. Many a times in the first few weeks I failed completely with my lessons. Time and practice made the challenge less insurmountable in that I became more proficient in finding a middle ground and also I developed sub-strategies to further ease my difficulty.

Her key strategy is to find a common or middle ground, which she pursued relentlessly even when the amount of success was not encouraging. Aida understands that it is extremely important to give equal attention to all her students in the classroom regardless of their abilities and interests. This is done through trial and error and constant experimenting, with which she eventually manages to streamline further refinement of her understanding and ideas that facilitated her in developing "sub-strategies" (or opportunities). These sub-strategies are actually tools that assisted her in dealing with very specific problems that she faced in the classrooms. She explains of one of the sub-strategies that contribute to enriching engagements between students of different abilities:

Effecting mixed ability groups/pairs during group/pair activities was one of the sub-strategies that I developed to overcome this challenge. Having a mixed ability group/pair, I reasoned, would have the effect of the more able students helping the less able ones with the task presented and as such, the weaker students would not only be able to do the task presented but also simultaneously, exercise and stretch their capabilities by imparting their knowledge to the less able. This was my reasoning and my reasoning was more than fully realized by my students. The higher level ability ones were more than willing to aid the less able ones and I was a witness during my monitoring to the many endeavours that flourished.

The previous outlined strategy leads to another sub-strategy, which also aids towards easing Aida's difficulty. During the process of the more able student explaining or clarifying things to the less able one or during the process of presenting the lesson, she makes an allowance for the employment of mother tongue in order to facilitate understanding for the students as much as to facilitate the process of explaining for the better ones and herself.

3.2 Use of mother tongue

Aida had this to say regarding the use of mother tongue in English language classes,

Beliefs, as much as expectations, could lead you to facing totally unexpected challenges. One of the beliefs that were of extreme significance to me is that only English should be spoken during an English lesson. I was able to act upon that belief during my first teaching experience and as such, I did not foresee any difficulties in practicing that belief yet again. Even with the situation that faced me – mixed ability classes so different from the first time – I was still reluctant to let off on my belief. It was not until a couple of weeks with my two classes that I began to realize that using English exclusively in the teaching situation I was in, had not improved my students' capabilities but rather left them feeling bewildered and confused when they still could not comprehend the second or third explanations given still in English.

This second challenge is the compromise that Aida constantly has to make with her belief that only English should be spoken in an English lesson by making allowances for the employment of the mother tongue during lessons. She compromises and makes allowances for them to employ their mother tongue when completing group or pair tasks. This does not mean that they are to conduct all of their group work or discussions in mother tongue. She says that she tries as much as possible to encourage them to use English during these types of activities by asking questions about their discussions or progress with the task at hand and prompting and encouraging them to answer her in English whilst monitoring (Interview 4).

Aida realizes that her compromising on the use of mother tongue actually presents another sub-challenge,

I found that I not only had to compromise on my students' employment of mother tongue but mine as well as my students were afraid to ask questions when they do not understand in fear that the re-explanation will be given in English, which is the reason why they did not understand in the first place.

This strategy of using the mother tongue is not uncontrolled but Aida ensures the use of mother tongue is in accordance to her rules – she remains steadfast about instructions during the lessons, which would only be given in English. Aida explains,

The reasoning behind this is the fact that in the students' English language examinations, the instructions would be written or given orally in English only and no one present during the examinations would be allowed to explain the instructions in mother tongue should they not comprehend. The students would have to muddle through on their own. Therefore, in my opinion, using only English in giving instructions would aid towards facilitating this matter.

Yet again, the reflective practices have given her confidence to construct her own understanding of the situation and hence create her own pedagogical knowledge that she believes would dissolve her challenges and contribute to her students' learning even though it means she has to abandon her initial beliefs and views (on the use of mother tongue).

The compromise served as a valuable lesson for me in that I now view the employment of mother tongue not as a negative aspect but rather as an aspect of teaching that could in fact be very positive when employed in the right contexts and for sound, justifiable reasoning (Interview 4).

Employing mother tongue in terms of Aida explaining or re-clarifying concepts and vocabulary is not only beneficial in terms of making her students understand the lesson better but also in making them not afraid or reluctant to ask her questions when they need a clarification on what has been said because the students "know that they could ask me to re-explain it in mother tongue" (Interview 4). This, in Aida's opinion, also "aided towards establishing a working relationship, which was both friendly and of benefit to the two parties involved – me, the teacher and them, the students" (Interview 4).

3.3 Expectations of Teacher-Centeredness

The third challenge identified by Aida is students' expectations of teacher-centeredness in the classroom. She strongly feels that these expectations

...could lead to many difficulties being faced in the classroom as there are many different aspects of teacher-centeredness and you could, in fact, be faced with one or more than one aspect of teacher-centeredness at any particular given time. Things such the teacher having complete control over all that is done in the classroom – a totalitarian view of control, the teacher is the source of all knowledge – the teacher is there to provide knowledge and the students are there simply to accept and the teacher does most if not all of the talking in class are just some of aspects that are ensconced under that umbrella term 'teacher-centeredness'.

Aida students' expectations of teacher-centeredness in their classroom are particularly challenging. The fact that their expectations of teacher-centeredness focused not on just one of the many aspects but several at one time made the difficulty even more challenging. She highlights domino-effect-like instances of the students' expectations;

The students, first and foremost, expected me to do most of the talking while they sat and quietly listened. As such, my students were not very forthcoming when I attempted to elicit information from them or get them to talk to aid in the presentation of the lesson. They also had expectations of the teacher being the provider of all knowledge and their role is just to accept. This had the effect of me having difficulties in trying to teach deductively as they would not attempt to answer even though they in my opinion are capable of answering. Lastly but definitely not the least, the students also had expectations that the teacher i.e. me in this case is an authoritarian figure that has total control in all that happens in the classroom and that they do not have any say in the matter at all. This resulted in my students not being able or rather reluctant to inform me of what they think would be of interest and benefit to them even though I was the one doing the asking.

There are times in the first couple of weeks when she "felt like giving up and actually did by conforming to their expectations, which did not at all reflect my beliefs and convictions about teaching" (Interview 4). But she soon realizes that giving up is not going to accomplish anything, and "so I carried on with my efforts" (Interview 4). This is her fundamental strategy in grasping the challenge of students' expectations of teacher-centredness.

After three weeks, her strategies of encouraging students to speak not only of matters to do with the lesson in progress but also their opinion of what was happening in the classroom, teaching them not be afraid of trying even when they are uncertain of their answers, prompting them on when they have made a mistake and praising them when they are right began to show results. Her students begin to feel more confident and, "after a full month had passed, they were starting to volunteer answer instead of just standing and telling me they do not know" (Interview 4). Aida achieved this by adopting and promulgating the idea of establishing a kind of camaraderie in her classroom.

… the type of relationship that is friendly but yet not forgetting the boundaries that exists which is, to a large extent, akin to the relationship we, the degree group have with our lecturers also aided me in altering my students' expectations, thus achieving a more learner-centeredness classroom.

4. Discussion

Aida acknowledges that "Many challenges were met and whilst some were successfully conquered, others were not" (Interview 1). It is most likely that her success and 'failure' are due to her naïve beliefs about learning and teaching that were or were not "integrated with theoretically informed beliefs" (Brownlee et al., 1998, p. 107), which well emphasizes the significance of interconnectedness of theory and practice in any facet of initial teacher education, including teaching practice (Beattie, 1997). But what was interesting is she is able to identify the challenges, and then recognize the extent of her success (and/or 'failure') in dealing with those challenges via the strategies that she developed. This is an indication of Aida's rudimentary comprehension of her professional (in) competencies and pedagogical (mis)understandings and how (in)effectively she uses these in context of narrowing the fissure and disparity between her teaching and her students' learning of English, a situation described by Hedge (2000) as "a number of persistent concerns in the professional practice of teachers" (p. 1).

In addressing the challenge of mixed ability class, her first teaching experience and also from her own learning experience was valuable. Giving equal consideration and due attention to all her students creates "the context where all learners feel valuable and have the space and confidence to try" (Rose, 1997, p. 4). In an examination of powerful teacher education programmes in United States, Darling-Hammond (2006) emphasizes the need to develop a repertoire of teaching strategies that assist teachers in creating "opportunities for students who learn differently" (p. 257). Aida showed us how she aligned Rose's (1997) and Darling-Hammond's (2006) notion of creation of context/opportunities to paralleling the mixed abilities of her learners by creating learning opportunities in the classroom, where the premise is language cannot be taught but teachers can "create conditions under which it will develop in its own way" (Kumaravadivelu, 1996, p. 242) and implanted a sense of togetherness among her students in learning the language, where the students help each other in many situations at many varying levels that are framed by "a sense of discipline and shared purpose in the class" (Rose, 1997, p. 4). Though a study like Millrood's (2002) reveals that there is "no clear strategy in the teacher's professional paradigm for dealing with the heterogeneous class" (p. 129), Aida is successful because her reflective practices on the challenges enable her to develop sensible and consequential pedagogical knowledge that untangles many of her serious concerns and anxieties relating to mixed ability class.

The use of mother tongue enables the students to more able follow the lessons, language and activities conducted. It is reflected in the way they are better able to accomplish tasks and, asking and answering questions in English regarding what has been explained in mother tongue. This issue can be directly linked to the valid and often controversial debate of when and how much mother tongue should be used in learning English as a second language (Cook, 2001). She maintains that the main use of mother tongue is to facilitate matters for the students in comprehending the lessons or activities or completing the tasks expected of them as well as to her in overcoming the challenge of teaching mixed ability classes. Though Turnbull (2001) fears that licensing teachers to use mother tongue in language classrooms may lead to 'an overuse', thus limiting students' contact and exposure in the target language, Aida's experience tells us otherwise – her use of mother tongue is not misused, but rather has specific purposes and agendas where she has manifestly thought of when to use mother tongue and how she is going to utilize it to maximize students' learning.

In addressing the challenge of students' expectations of teacher centredness, Aida introduces the notion of camaraderie. Much earlier, Freire (1973) describes the 'camaraderie' mentioned by Aida to be extant in dialogues, which are not limited to the literal meaning of conversation or the action of speaking and listening, but which connote a two-way relationship/communication of words, emotions and actions between two individuals that promote "I-thou" kind of relationship. In these dialogues teachers and the learner respect and learn from each other in a genuine two-way relationship/communication mode. It also has the effect of making the students less afraid to attempt to answer or ask questions when they think they have a need to. Tudor (1996) also recommends similar active participation and involvement of students in every level of teaching and learning, including the goal-setting, planning and evaluating stages so that learner-centred learning can truly be alive in language classrooms.

This case study reaffirms Prabhu's (1995) earlier contention that a teacher is likely to "develop the ability only gradually over time, with many errors along the way" (p. 63) and Burke's (2006) findings that by teaching, language teachers create opportunities where they learn through experiences. But nevertheless, the present case study that integrates the pre-scheduled reflection at the beginning of Aida's teaching practice disengages from Prabhu's (1995) further claims that the trial and error practice is actually wrapped "without much conscious awareness" and with "a continuing tentativeness and uncertainty" of the teacher (p. 63). But Aida has shown that she is always aware of the strategies that worked and failed for her. She works on the successes (and failures) in her attempt to better and deepen the students' learning through the various strategies and sub-strategies that she developed along the way.

Data indicate that Aida basically used six main strategies, as indicated in Figure 1, to resolve her challenges. Different challenges required different combination of strategies. But three main strategies reoccurred in each of the challenges identified i.e. understanding the challenges; experimenting of theories and ideas (trial and error) and; being determined, persistent and perseverant. These three strategies seem to be the main contributing factors to Aida's conception of what she considers as effective pedagogical knowledge, skills and practices in seizing the challenges.

5. Conclusion

It is quite impossible to successfully overcome all the challenges that will come along a teacher's way. But by intentionally focusing on three of the most difficult challenges faced, the outcome is extremely enlightening in terms of unearthing best strategies and practices that could provide answers to unlocking those challenges. Aida is able to extrapolate key patterns and problematic issues that needed immediate attention and quickly solve them. It was also evident from the excerpts that Aida undertook different yet specific strategies to address different difficulties at the same time trying to find a common platform that would somehow explain more clearly of the intricacies of the challenges. All these were based on the 'trial and error' method – judging and evaluating what works and what fails, and why the challenges emancipated in the first place. This practice raised more 'questions' (of the challenges) for Aida to ponder, and opened up many possibilities for alternative strategies because she has her own value system, and that the extent to which evaluation findings became utilized was due to the roles of her philosophical orientation, politics of educational ambitions, personality make-up and other related factors (Alkin, 2000).

One implication of this study for teacher education, particularly for the Malaysian settings (and alike), is that the strategies used by Aida in apprehending the challenges ought to be considered as part of the course work study in the preparation of future English language teachers so that they would be aware of what to expect during teaching practice and the strategies they can apply. However, the strategies in Figure 1 are certainly not conclusive. In-depth studies and also perhaps a larger quantitative study are needed to identify the strategies that would be beneficial for teacher trainees during teaching practice, as well as for in-service teachers teaching in schools.

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Table 1. Coding, arrangement and organization of data

Example excerpts of strategy	Analyses (Note/comment): Pedagogical knowledge	Challenges: Strategy used
Therefore, my main strategy, like previously, was to effect lessons timed and paced on a middle ground so as not to intimidate the lower level ability students and at the same time, not to hold back the students with the higher level of ability. (Activity Code)	It is important to give equal consideration and due attention to all the students in the classroom regardless of their abilities and interests.	Mixed Ability Class: to find a common or middle ground.
I found that I not only had to compromise on my students' employment of mother tongue but mine as well as my students were afraid to ask questions when they do not understand in fear that the re-explanation will be given in English which is the reason why they did not understand in the first place. (Situation Code)	...beneficial in terms of making her students understand the lesson better but also in making them not afraid or reluctant to ask her questions when they need a clarification on what has been said.	Mother Tongue: to compromise in situations that would benefit both the teacher and the students.
By adopting and promulgating the idea of establishing a kind of camaraderie that is friendly but yet not forgetting the boundaries that exists which is, to a large extent, akin to the relationship we, the degree group have with our lecturers also aided me in altering my students' expectations, thus achieving a more learner-centeredness classroom. (Activity Code)	…active participation and involvement of students in every level of teaching and learning, including the goal-setting, planning and evaluating stages.	Expectations of Teacher-Centredness: to encourage, prompt students to speak, and to give opinion of what was happening in the classroom, and to teach them not to be afraid.

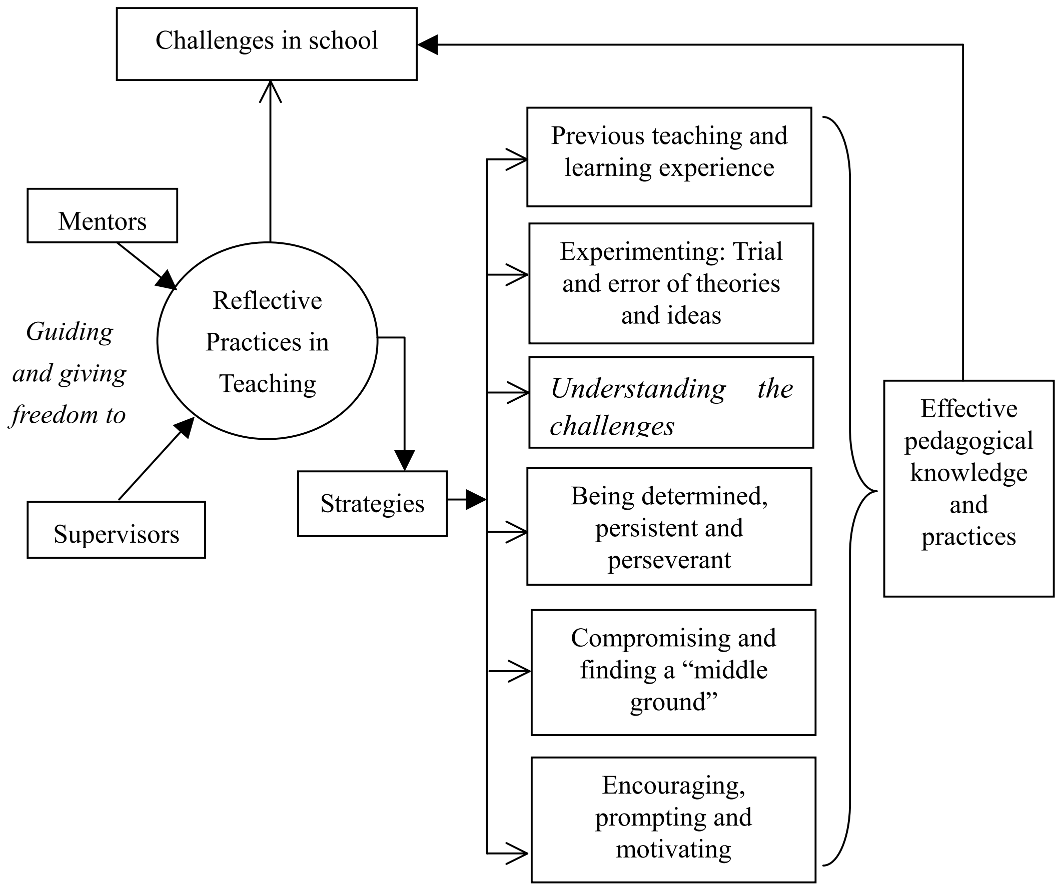

Figure 1. Strategies used during teaching practice

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Politeness Principle in Cross-Culture Communication

Yongliang Huang
Foreign Languages Department, Xianyang Normal University, Xianyang 712000, China
Tel: 86-29-3372-2670 E-mail: Hyl66xy@126.com

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Abstract

As we all know, different people hold different views about politeness. To be polite, Leech thinks you should follow "Politeness Principle" while Levinson suggests paying attention to others' "Face Wants". Sometimes what the Chinese people considered to be polite may not be true according to western culture. In order to adequately provide an educated answer to this heartfelt question, this paper attempts to shed light on some of the important differences on politeness between Chinese and western culture and their values.

Keywords: Politeness, Culture differences, Politeness principle

1. Introduction

In 1978, English scholars Brown& Levinson wrote an article "Universals in Language Usage: Politeness Phenomena". Soon after that, Leech delivered his six criteria of politeness in 1983. Both of them draw great attention to Politeness. According to Brown& Levinson " politeness involves us showing an awareness of other people' s FACE WANTS, and FACE refers to our public self- image. There are two aspects to this self-image: One is POSITIVE FACE, the other is NEGATIVE FACE. POSITIVE FACE refers to the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others. [my emphasis]. NEGATIVE FACE refers to the want of every 'competent adult member' [of a society] that his actions be unimpeded by others.

Among Leech's six criteria of politeness, the following six are very important:

(1) Tact-maxim (in impositives and commissives): Minimize the cost to other; maximize the benefit to other.

(2) Generosity maxim (in impositives and commissives): minimise benefit to self,maximise cost to self.

(3) Approbation maxim (in expressives and assertives): minimise dispraise of other, maximise praise of other.

(4) Modesty maxim (in expressives and assertives):minimise praise of self, maximize dispraise of self.

(5) Agreement maxim (in assertives): minimise disagreement between self and other, maximise agreement between self and other.

(6) Sympathy maxim (in assertives): minimise antipathy between self and other, maximise sympathy between self and other.

And in China, serious study of politeness within the linguistic circles did not begin until the early 1980s. According to Chinese history and traditional culture, Mr. Gu Yueguo of Beijing Foreign Studies University have contribute the politeness of study in China. He has traced the origin of the notion of politeness in the Chinese culture, and has also formulated a different kind of politeness maxims, which he thinks are more suitable to the Chinese environment.

Mr. Gu believed that there are basically four aspects of Chinese conception of politeness (we call in Chinese limao): respectfulness, modesty, attitudinal warmth, and refinement. Respectfulness is self's positive appreciation or admiration of other concerning the latter's face, social status, and so on. Modesty can be seemed as another way of saying 'self-denigration'. Attitudinal warmth is self's demonstration of kindness, consideration, and hospitality to other, and Refinement refers to self's behavior to other which meets certain standards. (Gu, 1990)

Theorists have dug in every way to discover the ways to be polite. But there have always been exceptions in the standards put by them and culture difference has been a main source of most of these exceptions.

2. The Definition of Politeness

What is politeness? This question seems naive and simple. In our daily life, we have the awareness of what is a polite action or not. For instance, to offer your seat to the elderly on a bus is considered polite behavior, and to interrupt when someone is talking is considered impolite behavior; to greet to someone at the first time when you meet in the morning is polite and to stand up to reach for the dish you want at a dinner table is impolite. So first of all, politeness can conceived as an observable and social phenomenon.

Then, in terms of a means-and-end analysis, politeness is readily understood by means. We well know that in being polite we have an end to achieve. The most common example is that whenever we want someone to do us a favor we have to make the request in a polite manner. We say “hello! ”, to someone, or to shake hands with him, or send him a card on the occasion of Spring festival, or to give him a birthday gift or pat him on the shoulder—all this we do in order to show our good feelings, our friendliness, our intention to maintain harmonious relationships with him. In general, we act politely in order to show our wishes to start a friendly relation with someone, or to maintain it if it is already existing, or to mend it if it is being threatened for some reasons. To maintain the kind of smooth, harmonious interpersonal relationships called for by any human community, politeness serves as a ready means.

Politeness can also be regarded as a restraint apart from being a means to an end, some kind of social norm imposed by the conventions of the community of which we are members. Sometimes we feel that we have to be polite in order to show that we are civilized and cultivated to such an extent that we know what to do to live up to the conventionally recognized social standards so that we will not be accused of being rude or ill –manned. In order to be polite, we have to be tolerant. Under certain circumstances, to meet certain standards, we have to refrain from doing certain things which we would readily do in private.

To sum up, politeness can at once be understood as a social phenomenon, a means to achieve good interpersonal relationships, and a norm imposed by social conventions. So it is phenomenal, instrumental and normative by nature.

In many ways, politeness is universal. It can be observed as a phenomenon in all cultures; it is resorted to by speakers of different languages as a means to an end and it is recognized as a norm in all societies. Despite its universality the actual manifestations of politeness, the ways to realize politeness, and the standards of judgment differ in different cultures. Such differences should be traced back to the origin of the notion of politeness in different cultures.

As a social phenomenon, the evolution of the concept of politeness finds ready reflection in English language, especially in its lexis. It has arisen and evolved under the changing historical conditions. Synonymous with the word ‘politeness in English is courteous, urbane and civil. The relatedness between politeness on the one hand and court and city on the other hand and court and city on the other is only too clear and such relatedness is mirrored not uniquely in the English language but also in at least another major European language, German. In German which refers to the locus of its genesis is a living reminder of conditions which gave rise to it, and the German word can hardly be uttered without invoking those conditions. A second term referring to politeness in German that is used alongside was urbanity. This one was taken from Latin. The particular ‘urbs’ (city) it referred to was Rome, which was the unique image of and pattern for the city in the western world.(Ehlich,1992)

The apparent lexical relatedness between politeness and court and city has been confirmed by the research findings of some scholars. In some particular phase in history the behavior of the townsfolk was considered as polite, and in some other the behavior of those in the court.

To sum up, in the English-speaking culture and the Western world in general, politeness has been closely related to the behavior typical of a certain social location and a certain social group. To be polite, means to live up to a set of conventionalized norms of behavior.

In modern Chinese, the equivalent of politeness is limao, which is believed to have evolved in history from the notion of li. The notion of li originated with the ancient Chinese philosopher and thinker Confucius (B.C.551--479), who lived at a time when the slavery system had disintegrated and there were constant wars between feudal states; the former aristocratic social hierarchy was shattered and chaos reigned over the land. To remedy the situation, Confucius advocated the restoration of li, which referred to the social hierarchy and order of the slave society of the Zhou Dynasty (dating back to 1100 B.C.). To Confucius, it was the model of an ideal society. To restore li, it was necessary to zhengming (to rectify names), i.e. to put each individual in his place according to his social position. Confucius set much store by zhengming because he thought “if names are not properly rectified, speech cannot be used appropriately; if speech is not used appropriately, nothing can be achieved; if nothing is achieved, li cannot be restored…”and consequently social order and hierarchy cannot be maintained. Thus zhengming was an important means to that end.

About two hundred years after Confucius, the word li seemed to have been well established in usage somewhat deviated from the Confucian sense but in a sense very close to its derivative in modern Chinese, i.e.limao. It was found in a book entitled Li Ji (on Li) supposed to be written by a man called Dai Sheng during the West Han Dynasty. In the opening lines are found the following “Speaking of li, humble yourself but show respect to other.” If the notion of li advocated by Confucius was interpreted, at the risk of oversimplification, as social appropriacy with regard to one’s social status, by the time of Dai Sheng, the notion of li had evolved into social appropriacy by way of self-denigrating and other-respecting. It has ever since become an essential feature of the Chinese notion of politeness and has remained at the core of politeness in the Chinese culture.

From the above brief exploration of the historicity of the notion of politeness in both the English-speaking culture and the Chinese culture, it has become clear that while the notion of politeness is universal, it has different origins and thus different connotations in different cultures.

3. Considerable Items Related to Politeness.

To achieve the goal of politeness, we should consider it from the following aspects:

(1) Considering the social background of the communicator. Generally, the more educated a man is, the more he tends to show his politeness to other people. The more he knows about the suitable ways to show politeness, the better he uses them to be polite to others. Besides, the personality of the communicator is also very important here. Good-tempered person prefers to use "face-saving act" while bad-tempered person prefers "face-threatening act" when they come across the "face-losing condition".

(2) According to the communicative circumstances. Communication is a very complicated process. In formal occasions, people tend to use formal expressions to show politeness, esp. between the new acquaintances. While in informal states, people tend to be casual to show intimacy even if it is in the very moment they meet. And that doesn't mean impoliteness. Look at the following example:

eg.1. A man came into a bar and said to the waiter: "Hi! Buddy! Gimme some Whisky, would ya?"

Although they've never met before, the man used very casual phrases to enclose their relationship. This is a usual way to show friendliness to strangers in similar entertaining places.

(3). "In situations of social distance or closeness, showing awareness for another person's face when that other seems socially distant is often described in terms of respect or deference. Showing the equivalent awareness when the other is socially close is often described in terms of friendliness, camaraderie, or solidarity." (C, Yule. , 1996).

But there are exceptions. For example, people often use family names to call their close friends, and when these people speak to each other, they will use direct offer or request. But sometimes they use very formal expressions in their speech. Look at the following example:

eg.2. Husband to his wife: " Would you be so kind as to hand the bread over to me?"

Surely we know that the wife has just quarreled with the husband and the husband is trying to amuse her in a certain way.

Besides all the aspects discussed above, there's another important point to concern with that is the cultural differences.

4. Cultural Differences

Different culture causes different views of values, which affects the criteria of politeness and leads to differences in various aspects.

4.1 Ways to greet each others and farewells

The westerners often greet others with a cheerful "Hello!" or something like "How are you?" If they are talking with a stranger, they tend to talk about the weather as a way of greeting. But to Chinese people, they like to ask " Have you eaten?","where are you going ?" , " What brings you here?" or " What are you doing here?" All these would be considered as interferences to privacy for westerners.

When parting, Chinese seldom say "goodbye" as farewells that would be too formal or somewhat distant. Before they leave, Chinese guests like to say "I have to go now." "I am going." or "Stay where you are", and the hosts are used to say "Go slowly", "Come again." to see them off. While two friends departing after they meet on the road, one of them may say " I've got to leave." and the other may say " Let" s chat next time", " Come to see me when you are free." Or "I would visit you if I can." As for westerners, they often say "Goodbye!","See you!" when they part. (Deng Yanchang and Liu Runqing 1989, P170)

4.2 Addressing terms

Chinese often use one's occupation to address him to show respect, either in formal or informal occasions when their social status is considered to be high or respectful. e.g. Professor Li ,Teacher Zhang , Dean Sun, etc. If their social statuses are considered to be low, such as barber, cleaner, technical worker, cook, plumber and most people in service profession, people will often call them "shifu" instead of their occupations to be polite. To westerners, this is not the same. In formal situations, they often address people who hold high social status with their professions as: Professor Green, Chairman Johnson etc. But they never address people with "teacher or manager". In informal occasions, even a professor or a chairman prefers himself to be called with his given name to show intimacy to others. And they tend to call others like this while a Chinese may feel unpleasant to be called in such a term by unfamiliar person. For example, if a girl named "Yang Liyuan" is called as " Liyuan" or " yuan" by an ordinary friend, she will look on it as an insult. (Deng, Yanchang & Liu, Runqing, 1989,P171)

Besides, in China, "little+surname" or "old+surname" is an address to show intimacy but we cannot address foreigners in such a way.

The addressing terms used for strangers are also different. Chinese people like to use family terms to address strangers or people elder than them. For example, children are told to address adults with "aunty" or "uncle"; call old people "granny" or"grandpa", even at the first time they meet. But westerners never call a family outsider with those items. For instance, "Bill, can you get the report to me by tumor row?" The terms "Mr", "Miss", "Mrs.", "sir" and "madam" are widely used among people. " Mr.", " Miss" and " Mrs." are used together with a surname while " sir" and " madam" are often used alone. Another example is "Mr. Lee, there is a phone call for you."

When a Chinese want to draw the interests of a passer-by, he may use " Shifu" to address people of both sexes, but there is no such a term in English. They would say "Pardon me, Madam." Or "Excuse me, Sir." to address different sexes. (Deng, yanchang & Liu, Runqing, 1989, P172)

4.3 Ways to praise others

Look at this dialogue below:

eg.3. (Seeing a beautiful curtain in an American family, the Chinese wants to praise the room settings)

Chinese: "How beautiful the curtain is!"

Hostess: "I made it on my own."

Chinese: "Really? I can't believe it!"

The Chinese used surprising tone to show he really liked the curtain, this strategy works well in China, but the hostess felt insulted. We know the Americans are very confident about themselves. Imagine what they may feel when their self-esteems are being hurt. The hostess thought the Chinese didn't believe she was capable of doing it, and her ability was doubted.

What' s more, the westerners like to praise the hostess or the host on their first visit, they consider that to be polite and natural, but it may make the Chinese host be offended, suspicious whether he is interested in the woman.

In most cases, the westerners prefer to be praised over their house, garden, car, wife, decorations and room arrangements etc. esp. something made on their own hands, but often not their children' s beauty or intelligence which is considered as leading the kids to be vanity.

4.4 Ways to express thanks

The ways to express thanks are different in China from western countries. Westerners prefer to convey their thanks directly while Chinese like to minimize themselves to achieve the same goal.

eg.4. When you praise them: " How beautiful your dress is! Westerners: "Thanks a lot!"

Chinese: "Really? It" s just an ordinary dress."

eg.5. When they appreciate your help, westerners: " You" re really a great help to me."

"I can" t imagines how I can manage it without you!

"Thank you for enduring so much trouble I brought to you!" "I really appreciate your help!" …

Chinese: "Sorry to have wasted your time."

"Sorry for having taken up your precious time."

"I" m not at ease for bringing your so much trouble."

eg.6. Westerner's appreciations: "thank you. You have helped me a lot today. You must have been very tired." The other answered "it's my pleasure to help you. But I'm not tired at all."

The westerner is trying to maximize the communicator's help to be polite while the Chinese humbles himself to show gratitude. So it happens when a foreigner praises a Chinese woman for her beautiful dress, if the Chinese woman uses a Chinese way to show politeness as in e.g.3, her answer might be considered as minimizing the westerner' s ability to appreciate for he had shown great surprise over such an ordinary dress. You know what he would feel!

Another example is after a good dinner, you should express the thanks to the host. Chinese usually say "I'm so sorry; I have given you so much trouble." Westerners usually say "thank you so much for a wonderful evening."

5. Politeness and Culture Values

5.1 Considerations of privacy

Privacy is regarded more important value in English-speaking culture than in China. What is considered as an act of politeness in the Chinese culture might simply be regarded as an intrusion upon a person's privacy by an

English-speaking person. Mr. Gu has included ‘attitudinal warmth’ as one of the four aspects underlying politeness in the Chinese culture. To show warmth and concern for others is considered as a polite act. Different people hold different views about what privacy is. That is why when two Chinese meet; their conversation may include age, marriage, family, occupation and even incomes, all of which are considered as privacy to westerners. The Chinese think that they are being polite by showing concern for other people, and asking all these questions will help shorten the social distance between themselves and their interlocutors. But speakers of English, should they be asked all such questions, would feel their interlocutor is rudely encroaching upon their privacy.

Look at the following conversation:

eg.7. “(I feel close to the young man now.) I--- an old man

He--- a young man

I: How old are you? He: Nineteen. I: How long have you been in the army? He: One year.

I: How did you join the revolution? He: I followed the army voluntarily when they retreated to the north.

I: Who else are in your family? He: My mother, father, brother, sister and my aunt.

I: Are you married? … (c.f Ru, Zhijuan “ Liliaceous”)(c.f. Gu 1992)

This seems to be an interview or an interrogate for a westerner, otherwise it may be taken as an insult, but it’s a daily conversation in China. In China, people like to talk about their age, marriage, children, salaries etc. even on their first meet. That may seem somewhat ridiculous for the westerners, who never like things like this to be asked, for they look on them as privacy.

In the western countries, the homes and offices, desks and desk drawers are private territory. The letters, documents, journals or even newspapers on top of the desk belong to the person whose desk it is. Without permission, one should not pick them up and read or look at them. The vast majority of people will gladly lend you what is theirs—just ask. By the way, it is also very impolite to read over someone’s shoulder.

5.2 Considerations of individualism

Individualism spelled out in detail by the seventeenth-century English philosopher John Locke, that each individual is unique, special, completely different from all other individuals, and “the base unit of nature”. Individualism is considered of great value in English-speaking countries, it is closely related with the history and the culture. It usually refers to the freedom, right and independency of an individual. It is regarded that the actions showing respect to individualism as polite ones. Chinese, who have been overwhelmed by feudalism for more than two thousand years, is hard for them to understand individualism. So what is considered to be “threatening act” to “Negative face” “in western countries may be a natural or welcomed act in China. For example, Chinese people will not think “offering something”, “offering some help”, or “sending some invitations” to be an insult to individualism or a “face-threatening act”. Chinese people consider those actions to be of care or sincerity; they even think sometimes they have to force you to accept to show their sincerity. Thus it’s common to see Chinese people add food into a guest’s plate constantly to show enthusiasm; oblige others to accept gifts to show sincerity, etc. They are all considered to be polite in Chinese culture but the opposite in western culture. Westerners with a strong notion think that there is something wrong with someone who fails to demonstrate individualism. The individual notion is deeply rooted in the English-speaking culture.

5.3 Considerations of taboos

Taboos are the words that are closely bounded to cultures. Most of the items mentioned above may be looked on as taboos in daily conversations. Take the item mentioned in ‘Considerations of Privacy’ “age” as an example, in western countries, woman’s age is a taboo in daily conversations, never will you hear a woman ask you questions like “How old are you?” during your chatting

And in western countries, the aged people do not like the young people to call them as “old man”, they like “senior man” or “senior citizen” better. They do not like others help at all. Because if he accepts your help, it seems that he need other’s help and sympathy. It means they are old. Also there are many taboos we should remember when talking with westerners. Such as the questions about religions, salary, children, marriages, sex, etc. in Chinese traditional culture, there also have some taboos. For example, in the Spring Festival, people forbid to say some words such as “broken” and “death”. They are afraid that these words may take away their whole-year fortune. So to politeness, we should remember these taboos.

6. Conclusion

In a word, when we are communicating with people from different cultures, it is best to consult what is appropriate in their culture and act with regard to that, so as to avoid misunderstandings caused by culture differences. Because of the limitation of the author, this paper has not collected data in other more specific aspects, e.g. gender difference, taboo words, etc. That may be covered in researches afterwards. And I hope, with much understanding of the politeness principle, we can have a better communication with others.

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The Understanding of Metaphor in *Lives of Girls and Women*

Xiaoxi Li
School of Foreign Languages, Yan'an University, Yan'an 716000, China
Tel: 86-136-2911-6890 E-mail: gxylxxgzx@163.com

Caie Qu
School of Foreign Languages, Yan'an University, Yan'an 716000,China
Tel: 86-136-2911-6819 E-mail: Mayqu@163.com

Abstract

As the best writer of short stories in Canada, Alice Munro has consistently produced work in which precise social observation and penetrating psychological insight are expressed exactly with remarkable narrative strategies. Though my thesis is informed by my reading of Munro's published books, this study does not attempt to analyze the whole stock of her literary work. I concentrate on my discussion on one of her stylistic narrative techniques--- metaphor in *Lives of Girls and Women*, which is considered her most representative. With the understanding metaphor in the novel, readers know well the character's complex patterns of existence and the suppression endured by the female characters in a patriarchal society.

Keywords: Alice Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, Metaphor

1. Introduction

All of the areas of Canadian writing were stimulated by a renaissance of interest in literature and culture in the 1970s, but probably the greatest amount of attention in the 70s was focused on Canadian women writers, such accomplished writers as Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood, and Jane Rule. But among many successful women writers, Alice Munro has emerged as the most accomplished one of that decade. Her stories have subsequently been widely anthologized in Canada, the United States, and Britain, and she is internationally recognized as one of the great short story writers in English. Alice Munro is known for stories focusing on the emotional lives of the inhabitants of rural Canada. Her accessible and moving stories set in small and provincial towns like the one where she spent her childhood, are mostly written from the point of view of a young or adolescent girl and address themes of particular interest to women.

Among Alice Munro's collections of stories, *Lives of Girls and Women* is her most popular fiction, which places her in the top rank in short story writing. It is a set of eight first-person narratives recounting the life of Del Jordan in Jubilee, a fictional small town in southwestern Ontario that bears a strong resemblance to Munro's own hometown of Wingham. Told retrospectively by an older Del, who has moved away and become a fiction writer, it traces her childhood crises and initiation into adulthood.

In this paper, metaphor will be examined to show how this rhetoric means helps readers impressively to understand the social environment and conventional ideas of the small town Jubilee and their impacts on the townspeople.

2. Metaphor analysis

2.1 Metaphor in "The Flats Road"

The opening section, "The Flats Road", is notable for its evocation of place, as Del recounts for growing up in isolation with her parents and brother Owen on a fox farm that is " not part of town" but "not part of the country either." "We were in a house as small and shut up as any boat is on the sea" (Munro, 1971, p.29). Metaphorically, Del expresses her own ambivalent relationship to this place. She has an affinity for the natural world, but her sense of social alienation is profound. At the same time, the Flats Road is also a metaphor for backward and uncivilized world. For instance, Del's mother always tries to escape the Flats Road, which is for her the last place to live in. When people ask where she lives, she says: "at the end of the Flats Road" as if that makes all the difference. That the Flats Road farm stands for primitive isolation is made even clearer when the farm hand Uncle Benny went to the city to get and bring little Diane back and found himself lost in the huge metropolis. He finally gave it up disappointedly. Uncle Benny, a representative of the country people, is sure to get lost among factories, dead-end roads, warehouses, junkyards, and railway tracks in the city.

2.2 Metaphor in "Heirs of the Living Body"

In "Heirs of the Living Body", the written records of Del's Uncle Craig, who is the clerk of Fairmile Township and a local historian, contrast with the gossip and stories of her Auntie Grace and Aunt Elspeth, who live by themselves in Jenkin's Bend. While mentioning Del's cousin Ruth McQueen, Addie, Del's mother, said

She is "afraid to stick her head out of her own burrow" (Munro, 1971, P. 42). This is a metaphor which refers to the event that Ruth McQueen had won a scholarship to go to college, for she was very clever, but she thought it over and turned it down. She decided to stay home and preferred not to go to college. To people in Jubilee, ambition is what they are alarmed by. They think that to be ambitious is to court failure and to risk making a fool of oneself. They are afraid of being laughed at, which is the worst thing in their life. They have the kind of self –respect of the countryside people. They do not think it is wise to pursue new ways or to do things offered. "They (the countryside people) like people turning down things that were offered, marriage, positions, opportunities, money" (Munro, 1971, P. 42). That is why Ruth McQueen made the decision of quitting college. She is bound by the local code of social behavior which has shaped her life.

Moreover, the hide of the dead cow that Del sees and examines is a metaphor, too. It is like a map of the world, a map which connects Del's existence in Wawanash County with the world." Tracing the outline of a continent again, digging the stick in, trying to make a definite line, I paid attention to its shape as I would sometimes pay to the shape of the real continents or islands of real maps"(Munro, 1971, P.49). Del examines a dead cow at the Wawanash River, she imagines that on the hide there is a map of the world which she feels compelled to understand. Further, the death of the cow is also connected with Uncle Craig's death. When Uncle Craig dies and a cousin tries to force Del to view the body at his funeral, in an attempt to escape the cousin's grip, Del bites her and tastes blood. Later in her musing, Uncle Craig's death is connected with other deaths. Such are glimpses of the human connection of which her mother has spoken in reference to a magazine article on transplants called "Heirs of the Living Body", from which this chapter also gets its title. The article says that people are made up of parts. When a person dies, only one part, or a couple of parts, may actually be worn out. And some of the other parts could in fact have run thirty, forty years more. In Uncle Craig's case, his heart breaks down but he still has some good parts that a sick person may use. Thus the death of the protagonist's Uncle Craig occurring in the second chapter "Heirs of the Living Body" is related to other deaths. He, like all of Munro's characters, shares one living body with others. Further more, his death is envisioned as part of a natural process, and himself even dead, is still a part of nature, so that the protagonist's mother can announce: "Uncle Craig doesn't have to be Uncle Craig! Uncle Craig is flowers" (Munro, 1971, P. 53).

Thinking in such terms, nature is going on and on, though parts of it are constantly changing into something else. All those elements such as liver, stomach and brain that once made up Uncle Craig are only changing and going back into nature again. They will appear in birds and animals and flowers. So Uncle Craig is also seen as the metaphor for human connection with nature.

By dwelling on Uncle Craig's death and its connection with not only other deaths but also with the living world, Munro is working on a big metaphor. What is implied here is that although Del does not seem to value much of Uncle Craig's heritage, especially his effort as a writer of local history, she is nevertheless an heir of him, a partaker of one shared living body, so to speak, only that Del grows up surpassing Uncle Craig's generation to become a better writer in the end.

2.3 Metaphor in "Princess Ida"

"Princess Ida" focuses on Del's mother, Addie, who sells from door to door encyclopedias, which pose as a metaphor for her rationality, independence and mobility. She writes letters to newspaper editors, including letters to a city paper. She signs them with the *nom de plume* "Princess Ida", a reference to Tennyson's poem "The Princess", in which the royal heroine sets up a college for the education and emancipation of women. Her life ambition is to become independent, but she cannot quite make the full journey towards autonomy and she never escapes the consequent feeling of failure, a failure which finally sends her to the sick-bed, defeated by the coming to ruin of her best laid plans to guarantee her children's escape from the provincial life. Her efforts of equipping the region with encyclopedias, and spreading knowledge from house to house are looked down upon as eccentric in the neighborhood. And even Del feels ashamed when watching her mother being rejected at each door. Addie who tries to lift herself out of her narrow life and who pursues rationality, independence and mobility is frustrated by people with conventional ideas and is presented by the author as the victim of a rural, male-dominated society.

Another interesting metaphor in Addie's story is built around the image of "cobwebs": "Aunt Elspeth and Auntie Grace wove in and out around her, retreating and disappearing and coming back, slippery and soft-voiced and indestructible. She pushed them out of her way as if they were cobwebs" (Munro, 1971, P. 40).

Addie thinks that people, including Aunt Elspeth and Auntie Grace, are representatives of country values, which is like a “cobweb” often wanting to catch her, their “prey”, for she is so different from them and longs for a different kind of existence. Addie’s world is full of serious skeptical questions and she disregards housework. Unlike other country wives whose future and prospect end in marriage and children, she struggles for intellectual improvement. But her trust in knowledge meets headlong with hostile anti-intellectualism of her surroundings. It is not easy for her to realize her ambitions. Therefore, all her own frustrations are channeled into the hope and expectation that her daughter will have a different type of existence and a development of the life of the mind rather than the life of the body.

The above quoted passage not only shows how Addie must all the time fight the countryside values imposed on her by people like Aunt Elspeth and Auntie Grace and attempt to push cobwebs out of her way, but also implies that Addie will not easily break away from the cobwebs woven to capture her. The last sentence “I knew better than that” points to Del’s emphasis on the tenacity of cobwebs. They only look weak and Addie obviously has overlooked how tenaciously spiders weave cobwebs to catch flies. Her misunderstanding of the situation is proved by the sad fact that she cannot free herself from her unsatisfactory life, no matter how hard she has worked towards her aspiration. The cobweb, therefore, functions effectively as the central thematic metaphor in the chapter “Princess Ida”.

2.4 Metaphor in “Epilogue: The Photographer”

In “Epilogue: The Photographer”, the question of illusion and reality and role playing is focused in the question of art in relation to life. Del conceives in her mind a Gothic novel set in Jubilee concerning the members of the Sherriff family and all their tragedies. A significant figure in her novel is an evil-looking photographer who takes pictures which are frightening because they somehow make people look older and reveal hidden things in their personalities. Here Alice Munro has created a metaphor for her own kind of art which reveals something of the mystery of existence. As Del sets off from Jubilee in search of her real life, she abandons the Gothic “black fable” she has invented out of her small town childhood and takes with her only the intuition of “ Epilogue: The Photographer” that familiar things are both more ordinary and more amazing than she has given them credit for. They stubbornly resist being turned into fiction: “It is a shock, when you have dealt so cunning, powerfully, with reality, to come back and find it still there” (Munro, 1971, P. 275). Del in “Epilogue: The Photographer” is faced with the irreducible reality of Jubilee. Del sees the world in terms of her favorite novels, and is distorted of her fanciful notions. But Munro can accommodate both the ordinary and the bizarre in her fiction and enhance observation and experience without wrenching them out of what is true.

Alice Munro has talked about her fictions being fundamentally concerned with looking at what people don’t understand, what we think is happening and what we understand later on. The fiction is actually a subtle description of the lives of girls and women generated by the narrative techniques which combine the insights of the mature writer with the adolescent experience of herself as the subject in the stories.

The dominant metaphor gets readers a vivid and impressive understanding of how social environment and conventional ideas influence lives of people in Jubilee and how the mystery of ordinariness is revealed in the process. Such technique also helps throw light on the suppression endured by the central female characters in a patriarchal society, guide our interpretation and promote us toward a better understanding of the story’s complexities and overall meaning.

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An Analysis on How to Improve University Students' Hearing Ability of English

Xiaoshui Yu
Shandong University of Finance, Jinan 250014, China
E-mail: yxiaoshui@163.com

Abstract

Hearing ability is very important in communication. Most Chinese students feel hard to improve their listening ability when studying English because there is no language environment. In fact, the right way of practice is very useful for students to improve their hearing ability. In this article, some advices are brought up and they might be helpful to the students.

Keywords: Hearing ability, Self-confidence, Practice

In studying English, most Chinese students feel hard in improving their hearing ability. Hearing is very important in communicating with others. According to the study by American professor, Paul.Rankin, hearing covers 45%in people's everyday communication, speaking 30%, reading 16% and writing only 9%. In the five respects of learning English, hearing, speaking, reading, writing and translating, which represent university students' general ability of English, hearing is the most important. However, hearing is usually the weakest point for most Chinese students because of less and unsuitable practice. How to improve students' English hearing ability effectively? In my experience, the following should be useful.

1. Help the students' to build their self-confidence and raise their interest

Most students did not receive enough hearing training during their high school study. After they enter the university, they feel upset when they first have listening class. They will feel nervous and worried when they find they could understand little about what they hear, which makes them more difficult to catch it. If the students find that they can not make much progress a period of time later, they will usually become afraid of more difficulties and lose their interest in English study. Therefore, teachers should first tell them the way how to improve their English hearing ability, and let them realize the arduousness and progressiveness in order to help them build their self-confidence. In teaching, the teachers should make the class more lively and interesting by providing various materials, such as English songs, interesting spoken dialogue of movies and so on, to increase their learning interest.

2. Help the students to get necessary knowledge of pronunciation and intonation

A good master of basic rules of pronunciation and intonation is the fundamental thing for anyone to improve English hearing. In listening class, teachers should pay more attention to the following four aspects:

2.1 Stress

A content word is usually the key word of the sentence, which brings the most important information and should be accented. For example, in the sentence "You have finished the job.", the words "finished" and "job" should be stressed. Sometimes, the stress is put on the word which is usually not emphasized to demonstrate a special meaning. For example, in the sentence above, if the word "have" is accented, it means that the speaker did not expect that "you have finished the job".

2.2 Weak beat

In English, the particles such as preposition, articles, conjunctions usually have two types of pronunciation: stressed and unstressed. If stressed, it means that those particles should be pronounced separately. However, those particles are usually unstressed when they are read in sentences. The unstressed is usually demonstrated by reduced vowel: "at" [æt] is reduced to [et]. In oral English, the faster it is spoken, the more reduced vowels there are, and therefore, it is more difficult to understand.

2.3 Assimilation

Assimilation refers to that one sound is influenced by its adjacent sounds. For example, when consonant [d] is followed by [j], it is usually assimilated to [dʒ] and when consonant [t] is followed by [j], it is assimilated to [tʃ].

2.4 The pronunciation difference of British English and American English

There are some pronunciation differences in British English and American English. For example, when the letter "a" is before consonants [s], [θ], [f], [m] or [n], it is pronounced as [æ] in American English, but it is pronounced as [ɑ:]. In British English, the letter "r" is pronounced only when it is before vowel and not pronounced after a vowel while it is usually pronounced as rolled [r]. The combination of letters "wh" is pronounced as [w] in British English but [hw] in American English and etc.

3. Train the students to have a right hearing habit

First of all, let the students to have habit of expectation in hearing practice. Expectation refers to that the listener gives a quick judgment to the unknown information according to the known information. Teachers should instruct the students to preview the questions given so that they can be prepared and have some expectation to what will be heard with specific environment and cultural background. Besides, teachers should pay more attention to training the students to have the habit of catching key words and important information in listening practice. In fluent English, the pronunciation of some words will have some changes influenced by weak beat, assimilation, and the loss of burst of some stop consonants so that it is impossible for the listeners to hear every word clearly. The students should listen to some materials selectively. When listening to essays, the listeners should pay attention to the key sentences at the beginning and the end. They should try to make the questions clear, such as "who, where, when, what and why" and so on.

4. Improve their listening ability with more reading

The popular problems the students often come across are as follows: new words---some key words are great obstacle for students to understand the sentence or the paragraph; sentence structure (grammar) ---the coexistence of several grammar structures in one complete sentence will affect the proper understanding of the sentence. How to overcome those obstacles? Those obstacles can be overcome by more reading because reading, as listening, requires a general ability consisting of speed, memory, judgment, summary and understanding and they follow similar way of thinking. Reading can help the students to enlarge their vocabulary, make better understanding of the word meaning, grammar rules, and widen the range of their knowledge, which are very helpful to the students to have better understanding of the reading materials. By reading, the students can train their ability of thinking, comprehension and summary and thus to increase their speed and accuracy in listening practice. Extensive reading and quick reading might be the most helpful way for students to improve their hearing. In practice, students should try to enlarge their vocabulary based on understanding and train the ability to shift from one sentence to another. Students should pay equal attention to speed and understanding. When reading, the students should not always consult the dictionary whenever coming across a new word in order to keep a smooth consistent understanding. The reading materials should be similar to the listening materials in difficulty.

5. Instruct the students to have more extensive listening in their spare time

In universities, the students have limited listening classes, usually one class every week, which is not enough for the students to improve their hearing effectively. Teachers should give the students instruction for their after-class practice, such as watch English program on TV and English videos, listening English radio and English songs so that the students can get familiar with people of different accents, different sexes, different ages, and different cultural background. In this way, the students can widen their range of knowledge and train their good literary sense and thus to improve their hearing ability.

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Net-Based Learner Autonomy, Its Problems and Possible Solutions-A Case Study in WAHU, China

Chengping Wang
Foreign Language Department, West Anhui University, Lu'an 237012, China
Tel: 86-564-330-7662 Email: cpwang@wxc.edu.cn

Robert Hemsley
Foreign Language Department, West Anhui University, Lu'an 237012, China
Tel: 86-564-330-5028

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Abstract

The paper presents a study investigating the net-based learner autonomy of the first-year non-English major students studying in West Anhui University (WAHU). Through questionnaires and interviews, the study shows the problems in learner autonomy and presents a new perspective for the development of an auto-learning environment. The study reveals that students had difficulty adapting to net-based learning mode. Some proposals that the college, teachers and students could unite to tackle the problems in learning have been put forth as the solutions to the problems.

Keywords: Net-based learning, Learning autonomy, College English

1. Introduction

College English Teaching Curriculum Requirements (For Trial Implementation) was issued by the Higher Education Bureau of the Ministry of Education of China in January 2004. It confirms the net-based, multimedia-aided teaching and learning mode and requires that all universities and institutions widely apply advanced information technology and promote computer and net-based English teaching and learning in order to provide the students with a superior language learning environment. Further, it clearly points out that all higher learning institutions should make full use of multimedia and network technology, adopt new teaching patterns to improve the monotonous, teacher-centered class teaching mode, and that the new mode should be based on modern information technology - especially the network technology to make English teaching and learning free from the limitations of time and space - and develop towards autonomous learning. This shows that a net-based English teaching and learning mode elongates the time and extends the space in the process and thus creates a more fertile environment for autonomous learning, which in turn lays the foundation for students to cultivate their language skills.

2. Net-based college English learning

In the 1990s, Multimedia Approach to Foreign Language Learning (MAFLL) was adopted and tremendously promoted language learning. As an integral part of it, net-based language learning became popular for its vividness, animation, and conveniences. Learners become more active and enjoy much more freedom limitless learning atmosphere. Multitude software is designed to develop autonomous learning in China. Meanwhile, many websites have been set up for autonomous English learning. Linguistics achievements are made in schools, colleges and universities by applying the net-based language-learning mode, especially in relation to college English study. Learners can study either from the campus intranet or the Internet. In turn, this promotes learner autonomy in language study.

After the Reform of College English Teaching and Learning by MOE (Ministry of Education of China), net-based college English learning has become the primary focus of College English Teaching and Learning syllabus. As such autonomous learning is becoming more and more important in the students' English study, guiding and leading their study and learning activities and strategies. Since autonomous learning is emphasized today, the net-based autonomy has become a critical issue in college English study.

Through the data-collecting and case study, the paper tries to find out the respondents' readiness and tendency for learner autonomy in EFL learning by discussing students' actual performance in the perception of problems they encounter in net-based autonomous learning.

3. Methodology

3.1 The subjects

Participants in this study are 104 first-year non-English major students in West Anhui University. Their ages range from 18 to 21, comprising 78 male students and 26 females. They are majoring in two departments: Mechanics and Electronic Information and Technology. Their average English score in the college entrance examination was 105.5 out of a total of 150.

3. 2 Instrument

The data for this study was collected through a questionnaire and the personal interviews. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. In Part A, students were asked to provide background information about their name, age, gender, specialties and their score on the English entrance examination. Part B focused on net-based English learning. This part contained items about self-study each week on a single learning activity and three open questions that required respondents to offer whatever information they had about their strategies and problems in self-study. The three open questions were also the ones used in the interviews. The factors that affected net-based learning -- as well as the pros and cons on neb-based language study-- were also questioned in this part.

4. Results and analysis

This study is intended to find out the non-English major students' general behavioral patterns for net-based English learning. The results reveal the following findings and these findings might have implications for college English teaching in China.

Tables 1 to 9 present the results gained. Subjects' responses concerned with these 9 aspects will be reported one by one.

4.1 Learners' attitude towards net learning

Table 1 is about the degrees and frequency of students' performance on net learning. As is shown in Table 1, 43% of the students rarely learnt English on the net and 35% sometimes did, while only 2% always did. 46% asserted that the assignments on net learning were just fairly proper or sometimes proper. 45% of them were sometimes able to finish their tasks and only 2% could always do that. On self-evaluation and assessment, 36% sometimes did it and 32% rarely did. 34% students claimed that they never interacted with the teacher when learning on the net, plus 28% who rarely did. 40% said they sometimes had difficulty when learning. Students tending to exchange with peers took 31% of the total and 42% seemed to remain independent. Students' computer skills were affecting their learning and it took a percentage of 34%. As for teachers' instruction, most of the students claimed that it was not indispensable, with a high of 88%, which may result in their unrealistic goal setting and random learning.

As Shu claims, the second component of autonomous learning is attitude: learners should be active towards their study, i.e. be responsible for their study and devoted to their learning. From the analysis of Table 1, students' attitude needs changing in order to foster learner autonomy.

4.2 Place and time of students' net learning

Table 2 concerns the place where students did net learning. 94% learned through the campus intranet and only 6% on the Internet.

Table 3 concerns time spent each week on net-based English learning. It reveals that most of the students only spent a little time engaged in net learning just 2-6 hours per week.

From tables 2 and 3, it is clear that students' net learning was not so good. Their learning activities were mostly limited to the campus intranet, which was not suitable for the purpose of cultivating their autonomy. In other words, learners are advised to learn more from the internet where more sources for learning are available.

4.3 Students' reaction to the new learning mode

Table 4, Table 5 concern Students' satisfaction with net-based autonomous learning mode and students' preference net-based autonomous learning. Table 4 shows that 55% of the respondents were fairly satisfied with the new mode. Table 5 indicates that 56% of the subjects fairly liked it with only 3% who liked it very much.

Table 6 is about whether net-based autonomous learning should be the primary means of English learning respectively. Table 6 tells us the how the students regard the role of net-based autonomous learning. A very high percentage of them agreed it should have an active role. 46% of them fairly agreed, 31% agreed and 7% strongly agreed.

The three tables affectively conclude that students had not adapted to the new mode to a great extend. They did not show their full recognition for the mode at present. That is to say, there will probably be some time before learners to make use of the conveniences provided by the new mode.

4.4 Benefits gained from the new learning mode

Table 7 indicates benefits that can be gained from net-based autonomous learning in English

The main benefits gained from net-based learning are shown in Table 7 and most of the subjects considered it to be a good learning mode. But it is just from this perspective that they regard it so.

Net-based college English study has been established as the dominant learning mode since the Reform. This facilitates students' capacity for language application as well as their autonomy. In addition to the advantages listed in Table 7, there are more strong points to be considered. Compared with a more traditional learning mode, net-based learning style and autonomy boast a number of advantages:

(1) Students' individualized autonomous learning gets realized. In this context, learners can actively choose what they wish to learn, how, when and where to learn and they can finish learning tasks with the help of net technology according to their situation and interest.

(2) Students' learning aim and direction become clear. In the new mode, learners' tasks would be the only focus of language study. Students can consult their teachers or other students when they encounter any difficulty in the process of learning. And students can get teachers' effective guidance from teachers.

(3) Students can develop all the language skills completely and evenly. Net-based college English learning attaches more importance to listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating, especially the skills of listening and speaking. This enhances students' ability to use English widely and effectively.

4. 5 Problems in the new learning process

Table 8 and Table 9 concern individual problems and difficulties in net-based autonomous learning and net problems respectively. The table 8 shows the common individual problems and difficulties in the learning process. 78% complained about the computer set and facilities and 61% said they possessed a lack of vocabulary to fully benefit from net learning. In Table 9, common problems with net-based English learning were collected. 81% of the respondents said the environment was unsuitable for net-based English learning and 75% admitted that they were in great need of self-control and regulation when learning on the net.

From the study it is clear that students' readiness for net-based autonomous learning was somewhat unsatisfactory. As mentioned above, there are many advantages to be found in net-based college English study. However, in the learning process, there often arise some problems that cannot be ignored due to the influence of subjective and objective factors. Through the interviews and the questionnaire it could be claimed that such problems stemmed from two major types of cause.

(1) Subjective causes. Teachers and students hold different opinions about the Reform. Their proficiency in operating the computer and using the net varies very much. Thus, net-based college English learning and autonomy gets influenced and perhaps impeded. Thereafter, both teachers and students should change their perception, affirm the future trend and direction of net-based college English study and put the computer and net aided learning and teaching technology into practice. Furthermore, both teachers and students should master computers and the net in order to fully engage in net-based courses and the college English study system. Only the can the autonomy be guaranteed.

(2) Objective roots. This refers to the computer hardware, the LAN (Local Area Network) connection and multimedia courseware, etc. The new learning mode poses a rigid requirement on both computer and network. There are often connection failures or other such problems. To better manage these technologies, cooperation between English teachers and technicians--and another one between the English Department and some sectors concerned with the college--should be established for net-based college English study. Thus, learner autonomy will be fostered and promoted smoothly.

According to Shu, the third component is environment: learners should be provided with abundant chances to practice. He also emphasizes that without external environment such as teachers, teaching facilities and learning material, the first two items can never be realized, especially in the primary phases of fostering autonomous learning. That is to say, students' autonomous learning attitude and capacity cannot be cultured.

With regard to the problems encountered in self-study, one of the most serious was related to vocabulary. The respondents of the open net-based learner autonomy questionnaire and the interviews reported that they had difficulties in both remembering new words and using the words they had newly memorized and that their vocabulary is not enough to engage in net-based English learning. In addition, a high percentage of questionnaire respondents disagreed that peer students could help them with the study of English; further they rarely interacted with teachers. A possible explanation may be that students did not have confidence in the other students and teachers. The other one was their computer skills and knowledge of network technology. Fortunately, these two main hindrances may be overcome through their further study.

The net-based autonomous college English learning mode has improved students' English study as shown in the tables.

But there were problems during the process. Students had benefited a lot from the new mode. However, by comparing the benefits shown in Table 7 and the above advantages and disadvantages, it can be concluded that learners had not truly realized autonomous learning during net study and that the advantages of net-based learning cannot be seen here. It can also be concluded that students need time to change their beliefs and adjust to the new mode.

5. Problem solving

5.1 Problems on net-based college English learning

The net-based English autonomous learning mode has been applied in college English teaching and learning and it has shown its advantages and generated benefits for students. However, we did hear complaints about the "cold" interaction with computers and the apathy of the learning process without a live teacher. Students want to react to a real human being, not a machine. Meanwhile, many students showed their incompatibility to the new learning approach because of their own learning styles. As the questionnaire in Table 8 shows, 78% of the respondents were not satisfied with the temporary computer facilities at the university's language learning center and 61% said they had problems with vocabulary. Many students who come from distant areas have no experience of using computer and informational networks. That is why they may feel uncomfortable and embarrassed when stimulated to join this activity with 41% of them were impeded by poor computer operation skills and proficiency, and 40% complained about the poor LAN connection with another 40% not knowing what to learn. Besides, 81% of the subjects reported that there was a poor environment for such learning and 75% claimed that they had poor self-control and regulation when learning. 40% said they were affected by the poor management system. and administration in the center and 30% claimed that they had too little time to study on the net. The fee for using computer and network may also be quite high for them with 15% worried about the fees of net learning.

There are also negative health implications: Constant using of computer (during the network access) may result in students eyes malfunctions such as short sight, optic neuritis or even glaucoma. In addition, the increased level of radiation may result in chronic fatigability, nervous breakdowns and even cause dependency making a person addicted to the virtual world and unable to cope with real problems and events.

5.2 Suggested solutions

China is a big developing country so it's impossible to provide all high schools with the necessary technical equipment but after entering the university students obtain a possibility to enlarge their experience and operate new devices and mechanisms which is extremely important considering the wide usage of computers nowadays. Then, as to the problems in the Language Learning Center, we can update the computer facilities, improve the LAN connections and better the management system so that students can more easily learn without objective hindrances.

Being a non-profitable organization, the educational establishment has no aim to collect students' money groundlessly. On the contrary there can be a system of discounts and bonus network cards for talented students (as a prize) or for students from poor families (as a way of state care and support).

Ways of Overcoming Negative Health Implications:

Modern informational technologies are being improved very fast and main scientific efforts are directed to neutralizing the negative influence of certain computer parts such as radiation from screen. Thus following certain rules and instructions students may significantly reduce the danger of health damage without any loss of knowledge. First, the time of contact with the computer should be precisely restricted and this limitation should never be exceeded. Second, the bigger distance between the user and a screen is, the less effect of negative radiation will be noticed. Big screens or digital projectors allow arranging many activities with materials from the network but they give less harm to the audience than in case when each student uses a separate computer with a small screen.Third, special glasses and optional protective layer for screen should be inevitable attributes for people who use computer more frequently than others: coordinators (teachers), detached students who skipped exam and use their second chance or talented students who are deeply interested in subject and require more activities and tasks.

Fourthly, all students and teachers have regular health check in case of any slightest weakness or illness so they can always get a qualified medical service and advice. They must not neglect such effective means of saving health as eyes massage and special exercises, which are so widespread in recent years. Last but not least, teachers do not need to be all-time supervisors but be advisors with flexible time. If students studied mostly under teachers' supervision, their learning would never be autonomous but passive and forced. Teachers could offer advice and guidance on students' learning activities and help students change beliefs to adapt to the new mode.

6. Conclusion

Net-based independent study among the first-year non-English majors in West Anhui University is not so satisfactory. There is plenty of work to be done. In order to build up enough web-based tutoring and learning material, foreign language teachers will have to undertake a major share of the work as such measures have to be taken to make students sufficiently motivated.

Moreover, an information management system should be incorporated so that the burden of the users, primarily teachers and students, can be minimized; and material stored in the server can be easily and conveniently retrieved.

The Net-based college English study mode is an entirely new phenomenon in the field of teaching perception, teaching ideas and teaching methods. It was shown during the pilot teaching phase in some other universities beside WAHU that the potential of the students was tapped. As long as the teaching and learning activities are well arranged and organized, students can not only finish their learning tasks, but also foster a capacity for autonomous learning and benefit from future study. It can be claimed in brief that the new college English study mode has already shown its advantages as a practical and useful tool in college English study.

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Appendix

Table 1. Degrees and frequency of students' performance on net learning

ITEM	NEVER	RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
Learning English on net	2 %	43 %	35 %	18 %	2 %
Assignment received	4 %	21 %	46 %	24 %	5 %
Finishing assignment on time	5 %	20 %	42 %	31 %	2 %
Self-assessing and evaluating	13 %	32 %	36 %	13 %	6 %
Interacting with teacher	34 %	28 %	26 %	11 %	1 %
Exchange with peers	11 %	14 %	40 %	22 %	10 %
Having difficulty when learning	19 %	23 %	31 %	22 %	5 %
Computer skills affecting learning pace	25 %	22 %	34 %	8%	11 %
Needing teacher's instruction	29 %	26 %	33 %	9 %	3 %

Table 2. Where to learn

Campus intranet	Internet
94 %	6 %

Table 3. Time spent each week on net-based English learning

0-2hs/w	2- 4hs/w	4-6hs/w	6+ hs/w
47 %	31 %	20 %	2 %

Table 4. Students' satisfaction with net-based autonomous learning mode

Satisfied very much	Satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Dissatisfied	Strongly Dissatisfied
2 %	25 %	55 %	9 %	9 %

Table 5. Students' preference on net-based autonomous learning,

Like it very much	Like it	Fairly like it	Dislike it	Strongly dislike it
3 %	23 %	56 %	10 %	8 %

Table 6. Whether net-based autonomous learning should be the primary means of English learning

Strongly agree	Agree	Fairly agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
7 %	31 %	46 %	6 %	10 %

Table 7. Benefits that can be gained from net-based autonomous learning in English

Time saving	40 %
More ease English learning environment	58 %
Enlarging knowledge scope	80 %
More easiness and freedom when expressing opinions	61 %
Material searching becoming easy	7 %

Table 8. Individual problems and difficulties in net-based autonomous learning

Poor computer proficiency	41%
Lack of English vocabulary	61%
Poor computer sets	78%
Poor connection of LAN	32%
Not knowing what to learn	40%
Others	18%

Table 9. Problems with net-based autonomous learning

Poor self-control and regulation	75 %
Limitedness and pressure of learning time	30 %
No auto-learning ambience	81 %
High fees	15 %
Poor management in the computer and network center	40%

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Cognitive Transfer and English writing

Xinyan Li

College of Foreign Languages, Yan'an University

Yan'an 716000, China

Tel: 86-136-2911-6820 E-mail: lixinyanzi@163.com

Abstract

The author examines the cognitive learning theory and cognitive transfer in English writing, tries to find out how it relates to English writing, and how it influences English writing.

Keywords: Cognitive, Transfer, Writing

From the learner's preparation to the completion of English writing a series of mental activities are involved: logical thinking, reasoning and deduction. Learners need to conceive the ideas, choose the appropriate words and material to construct the paragraphs, complete the sentences in logical order, use certain writing techniques and do the revisions, etc. So the English writing process is actually a cognitive process. Then in order to know much about Chinese influence on English writing process the author examined cognitive theory.

1. Cognitive learning theory

Cognition is a psychological term. It refers to the action or process of acquiring knowledge by reasoning or by intuition or through senses. Cognitive psychology mainly studies the nature of knowledge, the way of obtaining knowledge and how to apply it. So it focuses on active role of human cognitive organism (sense, understanding, and logical thinking) in acquiring knowledge. Cognitive psychologists applied this theory to second language and foreign language teaching and learning.

In the late 1960s the linguistic research began to move into the essence of language: the deepest level of language. Linguists began to find one manifestation of general developments, one aspect of cognitive ability to deal with the world and with self. These beliefs are found theoretical basis from Lois Bloom's research, along with that of Jean Piaget. Their research centers on the cognitive prerequisites of linguistic behavior. Piaget viewed that the overall development was the result of child's interaction with his environment, with a complementary interaction between the child's developing perceptual cognitive capacities and his linguistic experience. Bloom noted that an explanation of language development depended upon an explanation of the cognitive underpinnings of language: what children know will determine what they learn about the code for both speaking and understanding message. As to the second language research the cognitive psychologist David Ausubel (1964) warned against the trends of drawing direct global analogies between first and second language acquisition. He warned that adults learning a foreign language could, with their full cognitive capacities, benefit from deductive presentations of grammar, that the native language of the learner was not just an interfering factor—it could facilitate learning a second language, that the written form of the language could be beneficial, that students could be overwhelmed by language spoken at its 'natural speed' and that they, like children, could benefit from more deliberate speech from the teacher.

The famous Swedish cognitive psychologist Piaget believed there were two different organizational functions. One was functional invariant, which was an unchangeable inherited psychological function. It determined how human interacted with environment and society and learned from them. This function worked both for child discovering environment and for scientists discovering the world. Another function was cognitive structures or cognitive schemata, which was the result of functional invariant interacting with environment. The objective existence was the production of human learning from environment. In what form it appears was determined by the former organizational function, or the features of learning environment.

2. Application of cognitive theory to second language (L2) transfer

Cognitive theory provides a new perspective for language transfer research. It broadens the research field. Transfer of learning method began to be investigated. Chelala first found the transfer of second language writing method. She found many analogical performances when students wrote both in mother tongue and in English. They made a simple draft before writing in both languages, and paid more attention to language coherence. When they revised it they mainly focused on the substantial in content. Later a series of researches on L2 writing all proved the L2 writing method was greatly influenced by their first language (Jones & tetroe, 1987; Edelsky, 1982). So the similarities of technique used in L2 writing illustrated the positive transfer of first language.

From the stage of conception to the stage of embodying writing style L2 writers always apply their corresponding first language writing technique to help their L2 writing. Even in the process of L2 composition revision first language influences can be found. Hall (1990) analyzed four L2 learners revision both to their first language compositions and to their English compositions. He found the analogical revision to the two compositions written in first language and their L2 (table 1). And the writer of this article also observed four Chinese students revising their Chinese composition and English composition. I found they both made outline and draft for their Chinese composition and after the revision was made they also read it over to make sure the sentence was coherent and the word flow was smooth, etc.

Apart from this, researches on L2 transfer try to interpret the cognitive processing of First language effect on L2 production. Guo Chunjie, Liu fang (1997) analyzed twelve Chinese students (ten middle school students, two college students) L2 picture writing by using thinking-aloud. According to the data analysis Chinese involvement in English production is great (55%). 92% of students make response to the picture by thinking in Chinese. The greatest influence of First language on L2 production is not in its external form-first language transfer, but in the highest stage of cognitive processing such as the logical judgment, analysis and deduction (Guo, Liu, 1997). There is deeper level of Chinese influence on English—that is Chinese involvement. Chinese transfer is its primary form, whereas the cognitive process is the higher stage of Chinese involvement. That is to say, it is the English writer’s psychological response to Chinese transfer, the dynamic process of English output. Later Wen Quifang and Guo Chunjie summarized the five functions of Chinese in English writing: transformation, confirmation, generating ideas, retrieving L2 forms and controlling the writing procedures. They also studied the relationship between Chinese thinking and the scores of students’ composition and found that those who scored high less depended on Chinese for their thinking. Feng Guoxin (2001) analyzed the function of Chinese involvement in the process of English output and concluded that Chinese involvement made the English writer form the habit of mental translation. That is, English learners first obtain or form concept in Chinese, and then express it in English. English learners cannot think automatically in English, which is derived from the fact that the Chinese has a closer relation to concept than to English. And the research further proved that most English writer’s target language psycho-vocabulary could not meet the demand of English writer in writing. So the English writer should actively build up his psycho-vocabulary so as to improve one’s ability of expressing his mind in English, try to form concept in English and slowly reduce mental translation.

When L2 writers write composition they naturally expect to draw words form mind the topic-related phrases. He will choose the contextual words to form a sentence or a whole piece, and these words are just the psycho-vocabulary mentioned above. If the L2 writer did not fully grasp such vocabulary and was forced to express himself in English he had to turn to his mother tongue so the error may result.

Zhang Guorong (2002) compared the cognitive process of Chinese writing with English writing he found the highest degree of active work of subjects. The subject processes information while writing. There are two types information processing: surface processing and deep processing. The higher degree of the subject’s proficiency level the more dominated the deep processing. Language information processing is supported by subject’s language background system. Usually the mother tongue language background system is complete while the target language background system is insufficient and sometimes vacant. This insufficiency or vacancy may result in subject’s borrowing of or relying on mother tongue language background system. In the English writing process the subject may use the two-language background system interchangeably. Chinese writer is only influenced by one language background system while English writer is influenced by both systems. If the two systems can be used interchangeably positive transfer may appear, and vice versa. Zhang (2002) also found the coding and decoding systems of two languages are essentially different. English writer does not only use target language to code and decode language information he also switches frequently from native to target language coding and decoding systems, so it might take one more time and effort to write in L2. Obviously, it is quite rewarding to investigate the cognitive processing of language output because it is one important channel to deal with the transfer problem in writing.

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Table 1

Changes	L1	Percentage of total	L2
Word	62%		59%
Phrase	29%		26%
Information	52%		51%
Grammar	38%		42%

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A Review of English Learning Strategy in China

Yanxia shen
School of Foreign Languages, HeBei University of Science and Technology
186 East YuHua Road, ShiJiaZhuang 050018, China
Tel: 86-136-4321-0800 E-mail: shenyanxia21@hotmail.com

JuLei Song
School of Foreign Languages, HeBei Normal University
Tel: 86-138-3234-6236 E-mail: 498057319@qq.com

Abstract

With the attention paid to the English learning strategy training in China, more and more researchers and experts conduct empirical experiments in English classroom to test the reliability or apply the language learning strategies into learning and teaching practice. In this study, it shows distributing research on English learning strategy training with detailed data and resources. This paper analyzes the collected data and gets some findings. Some possible reasons are put forward in this research field; meantime, some implications in the research of English language learning are given in the conclusion.

Keywords: English learning strategies, Strategy training, Strategy research

1. The development and present situation of the English learning strategy training in China

Since six decade of 20th century, with the development of cognitive psycholinguistics, applied linguistics and cognitive linguistics, the research on the second language acquisition developed rapidly: emphasizing on the general rules of the language learning process and the effects of language learning process and learning achievements to the learners' individual characteristics on the language learning strategy research. So the language learning strategy training gradually becomes the one of popular ways of cultivating the learning ability both in China and abroad.

All of the papers or articles collected in this study come from the CNKI database which contains not only the researches from the English professors and experts but also the Doctor and Master' thesis by the postgraduate students who are major in linguistics or linguistics and applied linguistics. From the 1980s until now, there are 38 articles published on the important and core journals in China and abroad for our Chinese scholars. (Wen, Q.F., 2003). She conducted this research from two aspects: macroscopic and microcosmic points of view. Chen Hua and Zhang Yifang (2001) studies the juveniles, Xu Yulong (2003) has done the research on primary and middle school students and Su Yuanglian (2003) concerns the high school students. And the others' researches are about the adult English learners.

Wang Duqin (1999,2002), Zheng Min (2000), Ji Kangli (2005) and Zhang Yanjun (2004) had ever done the experiments on the metacognitive strategy training. Yang Xiaohu, Zhang Wenpeng (2002), Ji Kangli (2002) and Pan Liping (2006) thereafter are engaged in the research on the metacognitive strategy from the perspective of reading comprehension, Jiang Zukang (1994), Lv Changhong (2001), Yang Jianding (2003). While Su Yuanlian (2003),Zhou Tianhao (2004) pay more attention on the metacognitive strategy training on listening class. Wen Qiufang (1996), Wu Heping (2000), Yang Wenyu (2002), He Mingchu (2004), Yu Guang,Yu Hua (2002), Li Lan (2005) proves the feasiablity and necessity of the metacognitive strategy training from different aspects. Wu Hongyun, Liu Runqing (2004) and Ji Kangli (2005) emphasize particularly on the use of metacognitive theory on the second language writing. On the other hand, Zhou Juanfen (2000), Wang Chuming (2001), Shi Yongzhenz (2002), Zhang Qingzong (2002), Xiang Maoying (2003) studies the affective strategy training of the language learners. These papers shows the importance from different aspects of English learning strategies.

2. The research on English language strategy training abroad

Research on language learning strategy instruction has aimed at verifying the effectiveness of strategy training. Therefore, many researchers have experimented with instructing language learners to use selected learning strategies as a way to improve their language performance. Weinstein (1978) invested some ninth-grade students who were trained to use a variety of elaboration strategies and apply them to reading comprehension and memory tasks. The positive results showed that these students significantly outperformed the students who received no training (O'Malley & Chamot, 1995). Cohen and Aphek (1980) trained learners of Hebrew to recall new words by using "paired associations" and found that better performance in recall tasks occurred when learners formed associations than when associations were not formed (Ellis, 2002). In a training project to develop self-evaluation and monitoring strategies, Wenden (1987) reports that providing students with a checklist of criteria to self-evaluate their oral production resulted in successful use of self-evaluation as a learning strategy. The consensus of these investigations and others (Bialystok, 1983; Gagne, 1985; Sano, 1999; Johnson, 1999; and Dadour, 1996) tell us that language learning strategies are "teachable" and training language learners to use selected learning strategies can have positive effects on task performance and the language learning process.

In general, research on language learning strategy instruction has strongly supported the fact that it is valuable to instruct foreign language learners to have a good command of language learning strategies because proper strategy use plays a positive role in their language learning process and will ensure an ultimate attainment of the target language among the learners.

3. The investigation and the analysis on the English learning strategy training in recent thirteen years in China.

In the past 13 years, the articles and thesis based on the experimental study collected by the CNKI database are 171(See Table1and 2). According to the research perspectives, 54 articles belong to the macroscopical topics while 117 articles go to the microscopical topics. They are all experimental researches only. (Observations, interviews, questionnaires are excluded here.) Both of the two perspectives are concerned about the objects which contained six different categories: kindergarten/primary/middle school students, college non-English majors, college English majors, college non-English postgraduates, college English postgraduates and adults. But the scopes they study are different. For the former one, it refers to five research scopes. They contain 32 matacognitive strategies, 4 cognitive strategies, 5 affective strategies, 0 social strategies and 13 learning strategies (mixed). In the latter one, five different sub-skill strategies are mentioned here: 45 listening strategies, 7 oral strategies, 25 reading strategies, 16 writing strategies and 24 lexical strategies. With regard to the research scope one and two, there are still studies which are about the relationship between sub-parts of learning strategy and sub-skill strategies (See Table 3).

For the table 1, there are 21 articles that are about non-English majors which are treated as the research objects from the point of view of metacognitive perspective. There are no researches that are related to the studies of postgraduate students' learning strategies. This phenomenon happened not only on the metacognitive part, but also on the other research scopes. Little researches have been done from the angle of middle school students or below (3). But there are more articles or thesis concerning about the metacognitive strategy (8). In another word, the study on the English majors account for one quarter of all the researches done on the metacognitive view. From the point of cognitive strategy, all the number of research papers is 4 only with 3 on non-English majors and 1 English major separately. 5 articles or thesis are gathered here about the studies on the affective strategy with 2 on middle school students and 3 on non-English majors. Strangely, there are no researches included in the social strategy part which I think will undoubtedly arouse the scholars' interests and further discussion. The reason why I put the learning strategy (mixed) here is that they are special and overall studies about those six research objects which includes at least two or three sub-strategy analyzed in table 1. They are about not one detailed aspect but several strategies got together to intend to have a all-round understanding. The distributing pattern is more or less the same as that of metacognitive strategy but with all numbers much lower than those. They are 13 articles or thesis in all with one about middle school students, non-English majors 9 and English majors 3.

When all comes to all, there are 36 researches on the non-English majors which take up the largest proportion of all the research numbers (54). The numbers of research topics on English majors are 12 which account for one third of the former research. While the studies on the middle school students are only 6 which is half of the English majors.

Let's look at table2. Compared with the former table, this one demonstrates from the microscopical point of view about learning strategy training. It can be concluded that almost all the sub-skill strategy trainings have ever been conducted on all kinds of research objects except the English postgraduate majors. There are 45 researches about the listening strategy. 28 researches are on the non- English majors. In contrast, 13 articles or thesis are about English majors which take up half percent of the numbers of the non- English majors. Though the number is little, there are a few studies which are concerned about the adults (2), the middle school students (1) and the non- English postgraduate students (1). The second largest number regarding the sub- skill strategy is the number of reading strategy (25). There are 21 articles or theses which are related to the non- English majors. Only 3 are about the English majors and the topic about the adults is 1. And there are no researches on other aspects. Then let's come to the writing strategy. With 11 studies on the non- English majors which account for the huge proportion, 2 are on the middle school students, 1 with English major, non- English postgraduate students and adults respectively. And the overall number studies on this part are 25. The amounts of studies on the lexical strategy go near to those of reading strategy. There are 17 researches which are about the non- English majors. 5 are about English majors and 2 are on the middle school students while there is a lack of studies about both postgraduates and adults. With regard to the writing strategy, the amounts of studies about the non-English majors are still the greatest number (11) whereas the total numbers are 16. 2 works over the middle school students and 1 for English majors, non- English postgraduates and adults separately. The studies about the oral strategy are only 7 which makes up the least proportion of all the researches. 5 are on the non- English majors, 1 is about the middle school students and 1 is anent the English major.

In table 3, it shows that how the metacognitive, cognitive ,affective strategies and social strategy are applied in the separate learning processes: listening, reading, speaking, writing and remembering new words. From the table it can be seen one research field which has never been investigated or discussed in the CNKI databases, that is the application on social strategy training. The conclusion ban be easily drawn that there are much more researches done on the application of metacognitive strategies than any other learning strategies. There are 32 studies on it while the total numbers of the strategy training are 41. Both the application of cognitive and affective strategy on the sub- skill learning processes are few. Five are about the affective strategy training with one related to speaking, and the other ones are about other learning processes or mixed learning processes. There are 4 researches which are concerned about the cognitive strategy training on the sub- skill learning processes in which 1 is speaking process, 1 is reading process and 1 is lexical learning process. From another point of view, 12 experiments are conducted on the listening process and it's only about the study between metacognitive strategy training and listening. From the angle of the lexical learning process, there are 6 articles or thesis about it. While both five studies deal with the reading and writing process.

4. Results and findings from the three tables

4.1 Finding One

More attention should be paid on the postgraduates and adults' English learning strategy, because the numbers of these groups are becoming increased and in order to make our teaching theory more feasible and effective, more experimental subjects should be used on testing and evaluating. Though the attention paid much more on the college or middle school students, the investigation and survey should not be neglected on the more advanced or older generations. This is the vacancy which should be explored in the future.

Another reason why the studies are conducted little on them is that the postgraduates and adults are very different from the groups mentioned before them, such as learning environment, learning experience, state of mind, learning emphasis and so on. Though the postgraduates are still the students in the campus like the others, they will have to put more energy or attention on the thesis writing (not only the M.A. thesis but also the other kinds of papers required to be published on the key journals during the studying period) and the exercise of cultivating working ability for the future (take doing some part-time jobs in spare time as an example). Most of the adults haven't learned English for many years, some even admitted they had never studied English well since they began to learn English. For the motivation of English learning, most of them are mostly to use English as a tool to communicate and they don't put this issue in the right position. In a word they are the special groups which can not be controlled easily and conveniently, and another reason are that the population of them are relatively far fewer than the others which may misguide the researchers the insignificance of the studies on them.

4.2 Finding two

Social learning strategy means seeking communication with target language users and language community, developing communication strategies, and getting involved as participants in authentic language use (Stern, 1975, 1983). Affective strategies is lower your anxiety such as using progressive relaxation, deep breathing, or meditation (Oxford, 1990). Social mediation makes clear the cooperation of working together with one or more peers to solve a problem, pool information, check a learning task, model a language activity, or get feedback on oral or written performance (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990). There are no experimental researches done on the social strategy training which is vacant to the scholars or researchers. More studies are needed to fill up the deficiency displayed on the tables above.

So is the affective strategy training. Affective strategy means good language learners can cope effectively with the emotional and motivational problems of language learning. Classroom learning as well as immersion in the target language environment each entails specific affective problems. In spite of these difficulties, they approach the learning task in a positive state of mind and develop the necessary energy to overcome frustrations and persist in their efforts. They cultivate positive attitudes towards the self as language learners, towards language and language learning in general, and towards the target language and its society and culture. More effective experimental researches should be done on the aspect of English learning strategy training.

4.3 Finding three

Many students can understand while other people are talking but can not express themselves effectively in English. For the majority for students, speaking still remains the most difficult skill which reflects the weak ability to communicate with others even after many years of English learning.

It is well known that the oral English teaching has been the weak aspect of our EFL teaching and its researches have not made remarkable progress as expected. The production of spoken English is considered to be one of the most difficult aspects of English learning for teachers . From the data collection, many linguists and educators have studied the objective factors of oral English teaching , e.g. English language itself and social property, but seldom take the subjects of oral English learning, namely learners into account. They mainly study the learners' content needs instead of process needs. So the methodology and procedures suggested by researchers haven't produced obvious effect on oral English teaching.

5. Conclusion

From this investigation mentioned above, there are so many problems existed in the English learning strategy training field, which shows the revelatory meaning for the development of English learning strategy teaching and research. First of all, the distribution of trainings and researches are unbalanced. The people who are engaged in the learning strategy researches are numerous whereas the studies of putting the researches' achievement into experimental training practices are not enough. Second, the researches of experimental subjects are still unbalanced. The studies which treat the postgraduate students and adults as the subjects are very little. Next, there are the unbalanced phenomena existing in the sub-skill strategy training. Few researches were carried through on the application of cognitive, affective especially social strategies except the metacognitive strategies. The applications of learning strategies on the oral English are still very few. So such fields still require searching and discussing in later researches.

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Table 1

Research Subject Research Scope	Middle School Students and below	Non-English majors	English majors	Non-English postgraduates	English postgraduates	Adults	Total
Metacognitive Strategy	3	21	8	0	0	0	32
Cognitive Strategy	0	3	1	0	0	0	4
Affective Strategy	2	3	0	0	0	0	5
Social Strategy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Learning trategy (mixed)	1	9	3	0	0	0	13
Total	6	36	12	0	0	0	54

Table 2

Research Subject Research Scope	Middle School Students and below	Non-English majors	English majors	Non-English postgraduates	English postgraduates	Adults	Total
Listening Strategy	1	28	13	1	0	2	45
Speaking Strategy	1	5	1	0	0	0	7
Reading Strategy	0	21	3	0	0	1	25
Writing Strategy	2	11	1	1	0	1	16
Lexical Strategy	2	17	5	0	0	0	24
Total	6	82	23	2	0	4	117

Table 3

	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Lexicon	Others	Total
Metacognitive Strategy	12	0	4	5	5	6	32
Cognitive Strategy	0	1	1	0	1	1	4
Affective Strategy	0	1	0	0	0	4	5
Social Strategy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	12	2	5	5	6	11	41

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Reading from the Wordless: A Case Study on the Use of Wordless Picture Books

Marina Mohd Arif (Corresponding author)
Faculty of Education, MARA University of Technology (UiTM)
Section 17 Campus, 40200 Shah Alam, Malaysia
Tel: 60-35-522-7392 E-mail: mmohdarif@yahoo.com

Fatimah Hashim
Faculty of Education, University of Malaya
Lembah Pantai, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Tel: 60-37-967-5053 E-mail: fatimahh@um.edu.my

Abstract

For centuries people have conveyed meaning through the use of visual images, without the aid of written text. Consequently, wordless picture books have become a distinct genre within the world of literature. The wordless book is unique in that its content must be communicated solely through the use of illustrations. The reading of wordless picture book is an open-ended process in which viewers read stories by bringing their background experiences and personal histories to bear on the visual images they encounter within the text. This study looks at the use of wordless picture books on a seven-year old male nonreader. The investigation focuses on the exploration of the child's responses to a selection of narrative wordless picture books. This study suggests that wordless picture books are a good source for analyzing a child's early and emergent literacy. Acknowledging the importance of wordless picture books may deepen the definitions of emergent literacy and broaden our approaches to the teaching of reading.

Keywords: Wordless picture books, Early literacy, Reading

1. Background of the study

The use of visual images without the aid of written text as means of communicating and conveying messages has been part of people's lives for centuries (Considine, 1987; Heins, 1987; Whalen, 1994). In fact, our day to day survival depends on our understanding of the meaning that visual images convey. For instance, it would be impossible to drive on the road without the ability to interpret the road signs, and it would even be more difficult to get your way around places if you cannot comprehend the common public signs. "Children born into the first years of the twenty-first century are more likely to possess richer and better understanding of visual imagery and its modes of deployment than any other generation in the history of humankind. This is because their world is filled with images" (Lewis, 2001, p.59). These images could be moving or still, and they could be in combination with texts and sounds. This is the world in which they must function. Competence with images is now considered as a necessity in life (Lewis, 2001). "Increasingly such competence will be part of the context that young children bring to their readings of picture books, and however incomplete and partial those readings may be, they frequently differ in interesting ways from those made by parents, teachers, critics and academics. They sometimes see more and they often see differently" (Lewis, 2001, p. 60)

In light of this, "from the 1970s onwards, the speech and thought bubbles characteristic of the comic strip style disappeared altogether in some books giving rise to the wordless picture books. In thirty years or so this rather peculiar formal mutation has thrived and propagated itself as illustrators have tested out its possibilities upon an increasingly visually literate population" (Lewis, 2001, p.61). Consequently, wordless picture books have become a distinct genre within the world of literature (Degler, 1979; Lindauer, 1988; Stewig, 1988).

As the content of wordless picture books must be communicated solely through the use of illustrations, it is considered as a unique genre of text. The reading of wordless picture books is an open-ended process in which viewers read stories by bringing their background experiences and personal histories to bear on the visual images they encounter within the text (Crawford & Hade, 2000). "Wordless picture books provide a basis on which storytakers and storymakers can construct meaning and build their own narratives" (Crawford & Hade, 2000, p.66).

In reading wordless picture books, readers are faced with a variety of visual signs. They then assign meaning to these visual signs based on their own experiences, perspectives, and the particular context of the reading event. These sign systems help readers form a type of framework that informs their interpretation of the text and helps them shape their construction of the story (Nodelman, 1988). Similarly, Elster's (1998) study of influences on children's emergent readings of picture books showed that visual cues had a significant impact on their readings and that readers' understanding of text was greatly supported by illustrations. Studies such as these supported the belief that reading is a meaning-making experience and that this meaning-making process is supported and facilitated by children's ability to respond to visual cues within the text.

Since these studies investigated readings of books that contained a conventional printed text, as well as illustrations, it is assumed that the effects of visual cues would even be more profound in the construction of meaning based on a wordless text. As Nodelman (1988) notes, "The words and the pictures in picture books both define and amplify each other, neither is an open ended as either would be on its own"(p.viii). Thus, wordless books, "which do not have this type of print story line to amplify or clarify the message of the illustrations, are by nature less corrective" (Crawford & Hade, 2000, p.69). Wordless picture books then could lead to more divergent types of readings and may be more open to a range of interpretations than books that are accompanied by text.

2. Purpose of the study

This study was conducted in the effort to better understand the sense-making process that takes place when a child transacts with wordless picture books. In this study, a seven-year old nonreader was asked to share his reading of wordless picture books with the researchers. The researchers wanted to better understand the strategies that the child uses to make sense of wordless texts. Specifically, the study seeks to find out:

i. how the child responds to the characters and visual features in wordless picture books.

ii. the narratives the child is able to produce from wordless picture books.

3. Participant and the context

The participant of the study is Amir*, a seven-year old nonreader. In January, Amir started Year 1 in an urban public school (*Sekolah Rendah Kebangsaan*) and a diagnostic test conducted by the school revealed that Amir, after three weeks of school, does not have the ability to read in his first language which is Bahasa Melayu. A diagnostic test at a learning centre for English, reported that Amir's reading ability in English is not strong although he recognizes many single words and was able to provide lots of English words when shown with pictures. For example, Amir was able to fill in letters that were missing in an alphabet exercise. Semi-formal exercises requiring sentence reading (joining lines from sentences to pictures) and sentence completion (filling in missing words to pictures) were difficult for him. However, he knew the answers orally. (Kumon English Diagnostic Test Information, 2007).

In school, his class teacher noted that he did not have any problem understanding verbal questions and responding to these questions, and he also did not have problems understanding verbal instructions. For instance, when he was asked to name the colour of the grass, he was able to give the answer 'green' without any hesitation. General instructions given in class were not a problem for Amir to understand, he was able to understand the instructions given to him by the teacher and was also able to convey these instructions to his mother. For instance, when he was asked to wear sports attire on Thursday for sports practice, he was able to understand this instruction and conveyed it to his mother. Amir is at the moment placed in an intensive class for reading and writing (*Kelas Intensif Membaca dan Menulis* – KIA2M) and will go through this class until June at the end of which, the same diagnostic test will be administered on him again.

In preschool, the teachers noticed that he was very good at drawing and would put in a lot of effort and concentration when he was engaged in drawing-related activities. He was also very detailed in his drawing. He would draw elements where most children would not have even noticed or would not have even thought of drawing. For instance, when he was drawing the flag of a pirate ship, he would try to reflect the weather-torn image of the flag in his drawing. Nevertheless, Amir was reluctant with literacy tasks especially those that did not come easily for him, and he preferred to discuss the pictures than struggle to decode the text. At home (according to his mother), a way to motivate him to engage in text-related activities is to allow him to draw once he finishes the text-related activities or in between those activities.

4. Data collection and analysis

The data collection and data analysis procedures of this study were adapted from Crawford & Hade (2000). Data collection was done in four sessions involving the researchers and the child in the child's room, with each complete session lasting approximately 30 minutes. The child was presented with a selection of six different wordless picture books. They are:

i. *Just Open a Book* by P.K Hallinan

ii. *Ernestine's Upset* by Jane Wallace-Mitchell

iii. *A Walk in The Park* by Anthony Browne

iv. *Dogger* by Shirley Hughes

v. *The Visitors Who Came to Stay* by Annalena McAfee and Anthony Browne

vi. *Come Away From the Water, Shirley* by John Burningham

These books were all written by foreign writers and illustrators. The child was invited to explore the books and choose one that he would like to read aloud. The child was asked to look through the book, read the story aloud, and share his understanding of the text based on the visual elements in the texts. This process was repeated four times, with the child reading a total number of 4 books. These four books are:

Choice 1 *Just Open a Book*

Choice 2 *A Walk in The Park*

Choice 3 *Dogger*

Choice 4 *The Visitors Who Came to Stay*

During the sessions, the researchers asked questions and responded to the child's questions and comments during the readings. The child's reading and corresponding discussions of the texts were videotaped. Verbatim transcripts, supplemented with researcher observations related to the child's intonations, facial expressions, and physical responses, were developed. For instance, the child's change of intonation in narrating the story and commenting on some of the characters in the story; the child's facial expressions when he was trying to comprehend and to make connections with some of the visual elements in the story; and the child's physical movements in narrating the story (hand movement, body movement) were noted. Additional data were derived through document analyses of the wordless picture books used within the study.

The data were then analyzed according to the principles of qualitative content analysis which involve a systematic review of the data, coding, category constructions, and analysis (Merriam, 1991). The transcripts and notes for the child's readings were first reviewed alongside the accompanying pages of the wordless book, in order to see which visual cues had captured the child's attention and elicited a response. Then, each transcript was coded based on the five categories developed by Crawford & Hade (2000). These five broad categories of sense-making are:

i. Applying knowledge and experience to the reading

ii. Bringing many different texts to bear on the reading transaction

iii. Assuming multiple perspectives in the telling of the stories

iv. Incorporating story language and story rituals in each reading

Including active physical movement and play-like responses as part of the reading event.

5. Findings

The premise of this study is to learn how a seven-year old nonreader would respond to visual cues in wordless picture books. The child made sense of the stories by transacting with the visual texts in the books and assigning potential meanings to different signs encountered within the texts' frameworks. This sense-making process is categorized into five types and the findings of this study will be discussed in accordance with these categories.

5.1 Sense-Making Through Prior Knowledge and Experiences

Good readers do not read in a vacuum rather they bring their prior knowledge and experiences to bear on their reading (Rosenblatt, 1987). In the case of Amir, it was evident that he brought his prior knowledge about a wide range of subject matter to bear on the reading of each story. In reading the four books, Amir drew upon his prior knowledge in order to contextualize the signs that he encountered within the illustrations. For example, in reading *Just Open a Book* by P.K Hallinan, when Amir came across the picture of a pyramid, he said "It's a triangle" and he later asked the researchers, "What's the name of this thing?" and when told it's a pyramid, he went "Ahhh, yes, pyramid". He said he had heard the word before but could not associate the word with the picture when asked, instead triangle was the first thing that came to his mind when he saw the picture of a pyramid. Another example of Amir bringing in his prior knowledge to understand the context of the illustration in *Just Open a Book* by P.K Hallinan is when he saw the picture of a giant carrying an axe. He was able to say it was a picture of a giant but he had trouble finding the word 'axe'. He started by making the actions and sounds of a person swinging an axe and later told the researchers that he had seen the object behind his grandmother's house. When asked if he knew the name of the object, he said no.

Sometimes the lack of prior knowledge also caused Amir great difficulty in interpreting or at times he misinterpreted the visual cues in the illustrations. For example, when he was asked to describe the picture of a man on the moon in *Just Open a Book* by P.K Hallinan, he was able to say that the man went to space and was wearing a space suit but when asked where the man was, he said he was in 'cheese planet' and when asked why he thought so, he said "Because the planet is yellow like cheese". When Amir was faced with a concept that he was not familiar with, he also had difficulty interpreting the visual cues in the book. When reading *Dogger* by Shirley Hughes, he kept on referring to the sister character in the book as brother. The concept of sister is a bit foreign to Amir as he does not have female siblings and because the sister character in this book has short hair and is always dressed in shirts and shorts, he associated that character with a boy (brother).

Amir's choice of words in describing the illustrations is also very much influenced by his prior knowledge. He used the term 'belt of the neck' to describe 'dog collar' in *A Walk in The Park* by Anthony Browne. Amir does not own a dog and was not around people who own dogs, thus the term 'dog collar' was not a term that he was familiar with. Since the dog collar looked like a belt to him and was placed at a dog's neck, he came up with the term 'belt of the neck' which consists of words which he is more familiar with.

5.2 Sense-Making Through Intertextuality

Most texts make references, either explicitly or implicitly, to other texts in our lives. Consequently, reading becomes a sense-making process that involves a layering of texts and meanings. Good readers are able to read new texts by applying their memories of other texts, and by determining the interrelationships among these texts (Meek, 1998; Stephens, 1990).

In several instances of Amir's storytelling, he referred to other texts in his attempt to make sense of the text that he was reading. For instance, in trying to explain the boy and the girl's action of playing at the park in *A Walk in The Park* by Anthony Browne, he associated the action with the 'Tarzan' character in *Just Open a Book* by P.K Hallinan, "They swing like tarzan". When he later came across a picture of a gorilla at a beach in *The Visitors Who Came to Stay* by Annalena McAfee and Anthony Browne, he said "Gorilla should not be at a beach, should be in a jungle like that story"(pointing to the book *Just Open a Book* by P.K Hallinan)

In addition to relating the wordless books to other texts, references to television and the media were also prominent in Amir's storytelling. For example, when he was describing a picture of a dinosaur, he was asked by the researchers how he knew it was a picture of a dinosaur, he said he saw a dinosaur in the movie 'Ice Age'. When he saw a character in *Just Open A Book* holding a sword, he acted a fighting scene which he likened to the sword fighting scenes in the movie "Pirates of the Carribean". In describing the character of Robin Hood, Amir said he did not know the name of the character but the character's hat looked like Peter Pan's hat (Amir saw Peter Pan's movie on television).

By making connections among books, television and other media, the children transformed what could have been a simple, linear storybook reading into a more complex, richly layered intertextual experience (Crawford & Hade, 2000)

5.3 Sense-Making Through Multiple Perspective-Taking

Children's understanding of a book can be enhanced by being able to look at the plot of the stories from the perspective of different characters within the same story (Crawford & Hade, 2000).

Although Amir consistently reported his stories from a third-person point of view, he did show his ability to take different perspectives by supplying dialogues for some of the characters. For instance, in reading *Dogger* by Shirley Hughes, he created a dialogue for the scene where the boy was asking his mother to buy him his lost dog, "Mom, I need 5p, please, I don't have dog", then, mom said "I don't have money". In *A Walk in The Park* by Anthony Browne, Amir in describing the father calling for her daughter to go home, supplied a dialogue for the father, "Then dad says 'Girl, let's go home'"

In many instances during the storytelling the boy tried to be the character of the story. Though this was not evident by the use of first-person perspectives in describing the story, it was prominent in his facial expressions and physical movements in his effort to narrate the stories. Amir tried to curl the front part of his hair to make it similar to the letter 'S' and would do the flying movements (hands straight and body slightly slanting to the front) to describe the movements of Superman in *Just Open A Book* by P.K Hallinan. In this instance he was no longer just trying to describe the character from a third-person point of view, he was actually trying to be the character.

5.4 Sense-Making Through Story Language and Story Rituals

When children hear stories and are exposed to read-alouds on a regular basis, they tend to internalize both the rituals and the language of story time (Holdaway, 1979; Morrow, 1989; Snow, 1983). The child in this study brought story experiences to the reading of wordless texts. The language and the rituals embedded in his storytelling were greatly influenced by his previous experiences with books.

The boy's experience in storytelling was one where his mother would read to him before he goes to sleep. He has brought this experience to his reading as he initially wanted to sit on his bed and read the books but later decided to read at the table in his room as the researcher was seated at the table. Nevertheless, it was observed as the researchers were about to leave the room, he took one of the books again and read it sitting on his bed.

He also used the storytelling intonation when reading the books, he had rising and falling intonations and the exaggerated facial expressions which are typical in storytelling. He also incorporated the typical storytelling register in which he had the phrase 'the end' every time he came to the end of the storybook.

5.5 Sense-Making Through Active, Playful Behaviours

Lewis (2001) states that young children, either with or without adults present, almost always play with what they are learning. He added that "when children are able to play with language and with text we can be sure that they are in no danger of mistaking nonsense for sense, have understood the rules and are in possession of a competence that they can apply creatively in their own use of language" (Lewis, 2001, p.79). Many children approach literate activities in unconventional ways, developing literacy processes and sense-making strategies that are more playful and less verbocentric (Fueyo, 1991). Children are also able to spontaneously respond to certain texts in playful manners (Hade, 1991)

Amir playfully responded when sharing his stories. He used many playful body movements and hand gestures in order to describe different scenes. For instance, he made the swinging action with his hands in his effort to describe Tarzan's action in *Just Open a Book* by P.K Hallinan. Amir literally ran in his room to describe the running scene in *Dogger* by Shirley Hughes. Verbally, he used voice intonation, repetition, and sound effects in playful ways. Amir made 'swishing' sounds when describing the scene of Zorro riding on the horse with his sword. He acted and made sound effects (the sound of shooting of a gun and the famous 'Yeehah' cowboy yell) in describing scenes in *Just Open a Book* by P.K Hallinan.

In trying to comprehend the presence of a gorilla, a mermaid, and a shark at the beach and a bus in the sea in *The Visitors Who Came to Stay* by Annalena McAfee and Anthony Browne, he lifted his hands and shook his head and laughed. Although initially he asked the researchers the reasons for those things to be there, eventually he did not really want the answers and was just amused at what Lewis (2001) termed as 'rule-breaking form of activity'. The same play-like reactions could also be seen when Amir was looking at the house scene in *A Walk in The Park by Anthony Browne.* He kept on referring to some of the things in the scene as funny and silly before breaking into laughter.

Lewis (2001) explained that "the breaking of rules and the flouting of conventions do not necessarily imply obscurity or complexity, but they do suggest a strong connection with forms of play. Play is what children do, not because they are in a state of innocence, but because they are perpetually learning" (Lewis, 2001, p.81).

6. Conclusions

This study has clearly shown that reading does not start with words. In this case, a child who is termed as nonreader has managed to comprehend stories without decoding texts. Although his narratives may not be considered grammatically sound and at times they were a mixture of English and Bahasa Melayu (Amir's first language), they were rich with references to the written word, visual images and his other experiences that made up his everyday life.

The findings of this study are in keeping with the study conducted by Crawford and Hade (2000) on children's reading of wordless picture books. Findings of this study also confirm other research that have investigated children's reading of picture books (Golden & Gerber, 1990; Meek, 1998; Stephens, 1990, Lewis 2001; Fueyo, 1991). Both studies on wordless picture books and picture books indicate children rely on many of the same strategies for reading wordless, visual texts, as they do when reading texts that offer a combination of print and visual texts (Crawford & Hade, 2000). Words can turn pictures into rich narrative resources – but only because they change the meaning of pictures. For the same reason also, pictures can change the narrative thrust of words (Nodelman, 1988). This is an important thing to note for it alerts us to the fact that although pictures and words in close proximity in the picture book influence each other, the relationship is never entirely symmetrical (Lewis, 2001)

Children's reading of wordless picture books may provide a glimpse into their understanding of literacy-related activities, as well as insights into the sense-making processes they use when navigating texts. In general, wordless picture books give the opportunity for children to read books with multilevels and multiperspectives of understanding. Most importantly, these books allow children to navigate the story on their own and to bring in their own understanding of the world to the texts. What can be more motivating to children than having the sense of freedom and confidence to navigate 'their own ship'?

** Name has been changed to protect the privacy of the participant.*

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Implication of IL Fossilization in Second Language Acquisition

Xueping Wei
Graduate School of Foreign Language, Beijing Language and Culture University
10#215, 15 Xueyuan Road, Beijing 100083, China
Email: Xueping.wei@gmail.com

Abstract

Since the phenomenon of fossilization in intelanguage is proposed by Selinker in 1972, it has drawn much attention and commonly acknowledged at home and abroad. This paper introduces the definition, classification, presentation, and causal factors of fossilization in an attempt to help Chinese students better understand the phenomenon and avoid its influence by the proposal of some suggestions.

Keywords: Fossilization, Interlanguage (IL), Target Language (TL), Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

1. Notion of Fossilization

Selinker first put forwarded the notion of fossilization in the paper *Interlanuage* in 1972. He noted that 95% of L2 learners failed to reach the same level of L1 competence from his observation. This kind of phenomenon is defined by Selinder (1972) as fossilization. Fossilization, a mechanism…underlies surface linguistic material which speakers will tend to keep in their IL productive performance, no matter what the age of the learner or the amount of instruction he receives in the TL.

Selinker and Lamendella (1978) redefined fossilization as a permanent cessation of IL learning before the learner has attained TL norms at all levels of linguistic structure and in all discourse domains in spite of the learner's positive ability, opportunity, and motivation to learn and acculturate into target society.

The notion of fossilization has been interpreted differently by different scholars since it was proposed. For instance, there are terms like backsliding, stabilized errors, learning plateau, typical error, persistent non-target-like performance, de-acceleration of the learning process, ingrained errors, systematic use of erroneous forms, cessation of learning, structural persistence, ultimate attainment, long-lasting free variation, persistent difficulty, and inability to fully master target language features describing the similar meaning, which lead to confusion for quite a long time.

This paper is also based on some commonly accepted concept about fossilization. (1) it may appear at different language levels; (2) it may occur at different learning stages among age groups; (3) it may be either structure fossilization or competence fossilization; (4) it is usually manifested as the deviant forms from the TL norms; (5) there are soft and hard degrees of fossilization.

2. Classification of Fossilization

2.1 Individual fossilization and group fossilization

According to Selinker (1978), interlanguage fossilization falls into two categories, namely individual fossilization and group fossilization. The former is the persistence of individual learner's IL development, while the latter is the plateau in the diachronic development of a community language.

Usually, individual fossilization consists of two types: error reappearance, and language competence fossilization. Error reappearance refers to the inappropriate interlanguage structures that are thought to have been corrected but continue to appear regularly. It can be found in IL of beginners or learners with low proficiency. Language competence fossilization refers to the plateau in the development of L2 learners' phonological, grammatical, lexical and pragmatic competence. It is found in L2 learners who have been learning TL for a long period of time and arrived at a relatively high level. In fact, repeated errors are often the demonstrations of competence fossilization.

If fossilized language competence becomes pervasive in a community, group fossilization comes into being. Such pervasion often leads to a new dialect. Indian English and Singapore English are good cases in point.

2.2 Temporary fossilization and permanent fossilization

Selinker also classified fossilization into temporary fossilization and permanent fossilization. (See Figure 1)

Temporary fossilization, also called stabilization, indicates that fossilized interlanguage consists of learning plateaus, "where development of given TL features is simply 'arrested' or 'inhibited' for shorter or longer periods of time. (Sims, 1989) It has become one of the heated topics in the current fossilization studies.

Permanent fossilization takes place s a result of social, psychological and interactive variables. Researchers that temporarily arrested IL development can be susceptible to defossilization. It has also been referred to by Sims as soft fossilization or jellification.

3. Types of Fossilization

Fossilization is a linguistic phenomenon in its own right and manifested as deviant forms from TL. It occurs at all levels, from phonological layer to pragmatic layer.

3.1 Phonological fossilization

The difference of phonology is possibly the greatest difference between languages. Phonological fossilization refers to the repetition of phonological errors which result from the incorrect acquisition of pronunciation of L2, usually affected by L1. In English, there are certain pronunciations such as [θ] which do not exist in Chinese. Therefore, it is difficult for Chinese English learners to pronounce this consonant [θ] correctly. It is often heard that Chinese students say "*Thank* [snk] *you*" instead of "*Thank* [θæŋk] *you*". When such phonological errors are repeatedly made and eventually stay stable in the incorrect manner, phonological fossilization occurs.

3.2 Morphological fossilization

English has got a variety of changes in morphology and therefore has various grammatical morphemes. The most common problems lay in two aspects, inflectional morpheme and article. The third-person singular *–s* is a facet of syntactic agreement such as *drinks* and is suffixed to lexical verbs and auxiliaries such as *has*. However, there are other markers for third-person singular, such as *buses, crises, and criteria*. Since such linguistic phenomenon does not exist in Chinese, it often leads Chinese students to forget the transformation or to misuse the form. Articles are also big headaches for Chinese students, because there are no corresponding words or expression in Chinese. When and where to put which article stays as a mystery for certain amount of learners even those who with higher proficiency.

3.3 Syntactic fossilization

Different languages have their own syntactic rules. The most typical manifestation of syntactic fossilization among Chinese students is presented in tense. Chinese does not have obvious tense differentiation, whereas English has present tense and past tense in general that can be further divided into sixteen categories. Not to mention complicated marker system for past tense and past participle tense, it often takes time for Chinese students to decide the right kind of tense. In the situation that they cannot make clear distinction, they have to turn to their instinct for help from time to time and thus fossilization occurs.

3.4 Semantic fossilization

Semantic fossilization refers to the use of language forms that exist in TL but do not represent the meanings L2 learners intend to express in the context. For example, the word *individualism* is commendatory in the capitalism world but derogatory in socialism China, *dragon* is the symbol of evil in the western culture but the symbol of power in China. If a Chinese wants to describe a past patient but forget the word *die*, he may use *go to the west*, the euphemism form for *die*, but western listeners may feel confused.

3.5 Pragmatic fossilization

Due to the close relationship between pragmatics and semantics, fossilization in the two aspects is interrelated and overlapping. A pragmatic deviance is also termed "pragmatic failure" by Thomas (1983). In her view, pragmatic failure takes place in the cross-cultural communication and refers to the "inability to understand what is meant by what is said". Inappropriate language use results in misunderstanding, embarrassment, and even insult.

4. Causal Factors of Fossilization

Selinker contends that "the most interesting phenomena in IL performance are those items, rules and sub-systems which are fossilizable in terms of the five processes: Language transfer, transfer of training, strategies of second language learning, strategies of second language communication, and overgeneralization of TL linguistic material." (Ellis, 1999: 351) He also states that combinations of the five processes produce entirely fossilized IL competence.

4.1 Language transfer

Selinker (1972) believed that some language rules in the learner's IL are transferred from his/her L1. The errors in the use of L2 result mainly from L1, and the difference between L1 and the L2 is the reason for the occurrence of errors. That's why the transfer of L1 rules can lead to fossilization.

The transfer of L1 can be positive or negative. Positive transfer refers to that the similarities shared by the L1 and L2 help second language acquisition. Likewise, negative transfer refers to the differences between L1 and L2 that interfere second language acquisition. The negative transfer of L1 is what the behaviorists believe to be proactive inhibition; that is to say, the influence of what has been previously learned appears in the context of and interrupts what is learned afterwards.

Then Selinker and Lakshamanan examined adult and child L2 learners that illustrate aspects of TL that are candidates for fossilization (e.g., clauses with no tenses, IL morphological forms). In all cases, language transfer seems to be either the main factor or a cofactor. Their study clearly shows that there is a link between fossilization and language transfer.

4.2 Training transfer

Graham (1981) suggested that one of the major causes for fossilization of incorrect language forms is the lack of formal instruction in English. This researcher argued that “learning simply by contact has led many students to devise IL or idiosyncratic languages with rules often wildly different from those of Standard English”. A similar position was voiced by Valette who made a distinction between “street” learners and school learners. She claimed that “fossilization often occurs among ‘street’ learners who have had extensive opportunity to communicate successfully albeit with inaccurate lexical and syntactic patterns. As a result, their errors have become systematized and are almost impossible to eradicate” (Valette, 1991). “Street” learners are never corrected, nor do they correct themselves.

Valette’s conclusions are shared by Higgs and Clifford’s position. These researchers remarked that learners at Government language schools are “hopelessly stranded on various sorts of developmental plateau” (Sims, 1989). Higgs and Clifford called those learners “terminal cases.” They explained that “these learners have been affected by prior language experience of some informal nature…such as street learning in the target culture, which then inhibits their progress in formal classroom instruction” (Sims, 1989, 65).

Moreover, Higgs and Clifford argued that “contemporary approaches to second language teaching…place a premium on communication, often at the expense of accuracy; under such methodologies, learners will tend to fossilize at relatively low levels, because systematic errors in their IL will usually go unremediated” (Sims, 1989, 65). In conclusion, they argued that in the absence of formal instruction, some areas of L2 learners’ IL appear to be at least stagnant if not necessarily fossilized. Likewise, they claimed that particular L2 structures can be candidates for fossilization, while others are not. Incorrect teaching method can prevent successful second language learning in the sense that the use of inadequate teaching methodologies has also been suggested as an explanation for the occurrence of fossilization.

4.3 Learning strategy

In the process of learning a second language, fossilization caused by the incorrect application of learning strategies is the most common. Sims (1989) suggested that “someplace along the IL continuum, inappropriate or misapplied learning strategies could lead to fossilization of some features (phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical, psycholinguistic, or socio-cultural).”

Learning strategies refer not only to the overall strategies but also to the explicit methods the learner adopts in the process of second language learning, and the former is more likely to cause fossilization of language competence. The appropriate application of learning strategies helps process the TL input and therefore improves L2 learning quality. Some learners, however, may turn to learning strategies to such an extent as overgeneralization, simplification, incomplete rule application and inadequate declarative knowledge of L2.

According to Sims, the repeated use of unsuccessful strategies, i.e., those strategies which do not enable competition of a given language learning task, could impede a learner’s progress. Finally, Sims concluded that the “proposed relationship of fossilization and learning strategies… could be a key to the remediation of systematized errors, as the role of the learner information processing in the second language acquisition process becomes more clearly understood” (Sims, 1989).

4.4 Communication strategy

As Ellis (2002) defined, the cognitive component of procedural knowledge is composed of the various mental process involved in both internalizing and automatizing new L2 knowledge and using L2 knowledge along with other knowledge sources to communicate in L2. It’s evident that these processes involve L2 learning and using, where the former concerns learning strategy and the latter communication strategy.

In real communication, learners may turn to communication strategy, a systematic skill that a speaker resorts to while having difficulties in expression to keep the communication going on. Unfortunately, sometimes such “successful use of communication strategies will prevent acquisition”, Ellis (2002) said, for the learner may become so “skillful” in making up for lack of linguistic knowledge by the use of various communication strategies such as avoidance or paraphrase.

Also, the learner inclines to simplify the target language, especially to simplify the grammatical rules, for instance, the use of the articles, plural forms and the use of tenses. And this reflects the unsatisfactory effect of communicative teaching methods. If the learner pays too much attention to the fluency but neglects the accuracy, some language errors can be easily fossilized. If the learner only stresses the cultivation of communicative competence but neglects the language competence, his/her language competence can also be easily fossilized.

4.5 Overgeneralization

Overgeneralization (Ellis, 2000) involves the use of existing L2 knowledge by extending it to new IL forms. It happens when people apply a grammatical rule across all members of a grammatical class without making the appropriate exceptions. In fact, language overgeneralization always indicates the ignorance of rule restrictions, including semantic restrictions of lexis or other linguistic items. For instance, using the *-ed* suffix to indicate past tense for verbs like "go" and "think."

The reason for which overgeneralization is important in L2 acquisition is that it leads to failure in detecting the errors for language learners. The phenomenon always occurs unconsciously. Without timely instruction and correction, the errors will stay for as long as it can do.

4.6 Others

There is no consensus concerning the actual causes of fossilization. As broadly conceived, the causal factors fall into the following categories: environmental, cognitive, neurobiological, and socio-affective. And in turn, on the whole, all of these causal factors can be put into two groups: internal factors and external factors. (Han, 2003: 104) (See Table 1)

5. Fossilization Reduction

5.1 Adoption of proper learning strategies

A lot of the research has been based on the assumption that there are “good” learning strategies. Although this concept is questionable, there are successful learners. Their learning experience is of great value to others.

First, successful learners appear to use strategies more frequently and in qualitatively different ways than learners who are less successful. For example, memory strategies are used in vocabulary learning and dictionaries are used in vocabulary testing. Second, successful language learning involves attention to both form and meaning. Good language learners appear able to switch the focus of their attention while they are performing a task. They tend to treat language as a system by making effective cross-lingual comparisons, analyzing the target language, and using reference books. Third, different kinds of learning strategies may contribute to different aspects of L2 proficiency. Thus, strategies that involve formal practice may contribute to the development of linguistic competence, while strategies involving functional practice aid the development of communicative competence. L2 learners need to employ strategies flexibly by selecting those strategies that are appropriate for performing a particular learning task.

5.2 Reduction of negative transfer of L1

It is quite obvious in beginning learners of English as a second language because of their insufficient knowledge of the target language. Therefore, Krashen (1983) suggested that the learners are not expected to use the target language too early until the learners’ oral competence is facilitated with sufficient input and without relying on their native language to form systems. Otherwise, some inappropriate expressions can be fossilized. Corder (1978) pointed out that the native language of the learners offers various hypotheses concerning the target language, and only through abundant input of the target language can the negative transfer of the native language be lessened. The learners should not be encouraged to read paragraphs or articles and to analyze the grammar or the usage of the words in each sentence, for the reason that context is very important in mastering vocabulary, and the sufficient input of the target language is the effective method to overcome the negative transfer of native language.

5.3 Exposure to TL and TL culture

Natural exposure to TL has similarly been proposed as a factor that promotes L2 learning and therefore helps learners overcome fossilization. One way to expose learners to the natural target language is by allowing them to stay for some time in the native environment abroad. While this is not possible for the majority of L2 learners, they need to seek exposure to TL and TL culture in other ways.

As suggested by Krashen (1982), providing sufficient and optimal input from te very beginning should be the right way to reduce fossilization. First, multimedia instruments are highly recommended. Those materials not only contain standard pronunciation, but also reflect target culture. Second, textbooks with original passages by foreign authors should be adopted in that its way of thinking and expression can help L2 learners better understand and master the language.

6. Conclusion

Fossilization is an inevitable state in and has significance influence on second language acquisition. It deserves our attention and research to solve fossilization problems in all aspects of language. Only in this way can the level of English teaching and learning be improved.

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Table 1. A Taxonomy of Putative Causal Factors of Fossilization

External	Environmental		Eg. Absence of instruction, lack of input
Internal	Cognitive	Knowledge representation	Eg. L1 influence, lack of access to UG
		Knowledge processing	Eg. Lack of attention
		Psychological	Eg. Avoidance, simplification
	Nero-biological		Eg. Age, lack of talent
	Social-affective		Eg. Lack of acculturation

Table 1 is a simplified summary of the explanation.

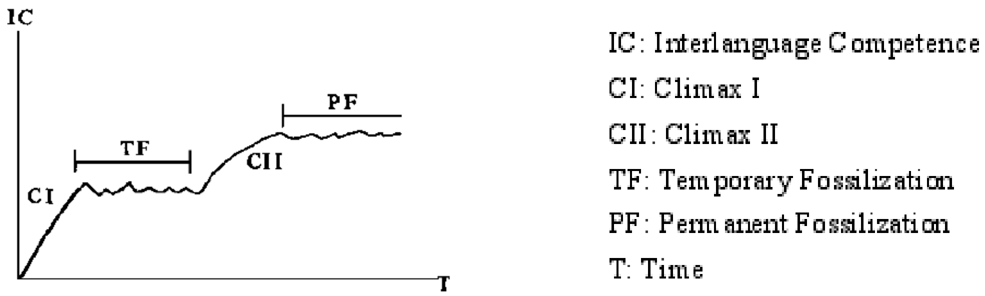

Figure 1. Temporary Fossilization and Permanent Fossilization

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Discussion on *The Trail* from the Perspective of Christianism Theology

Jing Wang

Department of Chinese Language and Literature, Shandong University of Finance

Jinan, 250014 China

Tel: 86-136-7881-1209 E-mail: wangjing_sc@163.com

Abstract

Kafka is a writer of strong religious complex. In *The Trail*, he illustrates his religious thoughts by probing into the alienation of modern human beings from the God and also shows his pursuit and befuddlement of beliefs. This paper analyzes the crimes and punishment in *The Trail* through three parts, the accusation of crime, the understanding of crime and the pleading of crime.

Keywords: Kafka, *The Trail*, Christianism

Kafka is a representative writer among writers of modern western novels. His long novel, *The Trail*, was called "the greatest works" by Brod, the editor of Kafka's works.

The Trail tells the story of Joseph K., who was accused of a crime he did not commit and was sentenced to death. If we judge this novel from mundane perspective, there is no way to explain why Joseph L. was accused of crime while being innocent. It seems that the story was absurd. However, if we understand this novel based on the theology thoughts of Christianism, the process lasting from K.'s being accused to K.'s pleading of crime shows the author's disquiet and thoughts about the living state, the absence of belief and the redemption of souls of modern human beings.

1. The crime of non-commitment of crime: the alienation of human beings and from the God

The Trail describes the experience of Joseph K., a senior bank worker. He is a successful junior manager of a bank and always follows the direction of law. On one fine morning, he was suddenly informed that he had committed crime. He received the writ of summons from the court and was required to attend the court for trail. What is stranger, the court did not announce what crime he committed and did not deprive him of freedom of movement. K. was furious about the act of the court. At the court hearing, he denunciated the corruptness of the law institutes and the judges' embezzlement of public property. He decided to pay no mind to this case. However, the increasing psychological pressure on him made him unable to eat and sleep well. He started to hate working. He put his attention to the case and visited lots of people and places for the case.

The writing style of *The Trail* is the incarnation of Kafka style. The seemingly absurd story contains deep thoughts. As is well known, in the works of Kafka, the Jewish culture and religious thoughts play significant roles. As remarked by critics, "if we do not take into account the explanation based on the modern thoughts, we will find that it is better to recognize that the works of Kafka is more closely connected with *Bible Job* than to include them into 'modern literature'. His works are based on religion, especially Jewish consciousness. It is meaningless to analyze Kafka's works from other perspectives" (Murray, 2006). Starting from this understanding, when reviewing the absurd description of *The Trail*, it will be easy to find the Christianism thoughts deeply contained in it.

In modern society, Nietzsche alleged that the God was dead. The belief of the westerners towards the God collapsed suddenly. They themselves become the God for themselves. They are self-centered, do as they like to meet their desires and even lapse from virtue. They alienate themselves from the God, discard their beliefs, are addicted to material desires and descend to earthliness. This is the common living state of modern human beings and is the crime that human beings have committed by breaching their agreements with the God. I am not, but the God is. In other words, from the time of birth, I place myself as the God. This is my original sin (Xu, 2006).

Besides, the theology thought of Christianism explains the "crime' in another way. The "crime" is "the damage of the glory of the God". Paul alleged that all human beings had committed crimes and damaged the glory of the God. Many of us will be confused at this sentence. Most of people on the earth abide by laws in their whole life and have never contravened the regulations and laws and entered into the court, never to mention committed severe crimes, such as killing people. How could they all commit crimes and damage the glory of the God (Xu, 2006)? This sentence just describes what K faces. From the mundane perspective, K. did not commit crime. Even, we can say that K is a successful man. However, in the theology thoughts of Christianism, the pride that human beings take in theirs knowledge, capacity and morality is a kind of crime.

In *The Trail*, Kafka fully illustrates the crimes of human beings when facing the God by describing reality. Human beings alienate themselves from the God but still feel that they are innocent. Like K., they defend for themselves with confidence. He attended the court to explain and defend for himself. He found lawyers to get clear understanding of the case. The activities illustrated in the novel reveal various phenomenons in real world. The random description of the seemingly trivial events reflects the nature of the social reality. It is those trivial events that cause the alienation of human beings from the God and their betrayal of the God.

"How does crime enter into this world? Human beings should find the answer themselves; if he or she wants to know the reason from others, the understanding will be erroneous" (Xu, 2006). Therefore, Kafka let the characters in his novel face their real selfs so as to understand the crimes they have committed, just like K. in *The Trail* who fully devoted to the reasoning of the case. This is a process he understands the crime and is also a chance for him to get away from the earthliness and return to the spirit.

2. The road of understanding the crimes: the lamb of the God, who lost way but found the way back

At the beginning, K. just let alone the case. Afterwards, he focused his attention on the case and gradually entered into the understanding of crimes. The lawyer he employed comprised with the court and delayed the case. He was irritated and left for others.

He then went to visit a painter and was advised that once the court filed the lawsuit, he was ascertained to be guilty and no law could ever change it. However, there is possibility of being acquitted, including real acquittal, release on parole, and the postponement of trail. The release on parole and the postponement of trail could only bring him temporary freedom. The ideal way is to get acquittal. However, no one on the earth could ever get it. What is more, the painter told K that even judges of highest rank on the earth was low-classed. They were not entitled to rule someone to be acquitted; only the highest court could. But, no one, including you, I and others, could get close to that court. In this connection, it can be told that the highest court described by Kafka does not belong to the earth; rather, the highest court refers to the God that the common people could hardly know well. Only the God can adjudicate whether a human is guilty or not. By this way, Kafka let K. gradually realize the existence and the power of the God.

Then, K. met the merchant Bullock who was also involved in a case. The merchant told K that a person involved in a case would be exhausted at last and could do nothing. K. did not want to be like him. Hence, K fired his lawyer and got himself out of the mundane trail. K., after giving up the mundane defense, shouldered his own life and went to search for the destination of his life.

At last, K. came to a big church. At the place where human beings communicated with the God, K. met a priest. There he listened to the story, "in front of the door of law", told by the priest. He was told that there was law. However, the road leading to the law was blocked and hard to achieve.

The characteristic of modern society alienates human beings from the God and their spiritual beliefs. Like spiritual wanderers, they are waddling lonely on the wold. They are searching for the direction of their lives and will not quit no matter how hard it is. In *The Trail*, K. gradually realized his crimes in the process of searching and asking.

This is a process of understanding crimes. K. gradually became aware of the distortion of the relationship between the God and him and tried to adjust the relationship. "The most basic nature of crime is breach of contract and is the damage of the relationship between the God and human beings by contravening commandments" (Xu, 2006). K., living in the modern world, just had an obscure memory of the God and even forgot his agreement with the God. Every day, he was engaged in the real materials and neglected the pursuit of spiritual world and the communication with the God, which is just the crime he committed. Actually, K. represents modern human beings. Every person lives under the state as K. did. Kafka, just like a prophet, predicted the helplessness of modern human beings in their lives and reminded human beings who committed the crimes to find their way back. The search process of K. warns human beings to acknowledge their faults and follow their beliefs.

The existence of human beings is not just to deal with the exterior objective reality. What is more importance for the existence of human beings is the individual spiritual life. In the process of human beings' understanding of crimes, they communicate with the God again, realize their crimes, and re-understand life and existence. However, after understanding crimes, where can human beings already addicted into crimes go? Will the redemption of the God come again?

3. The death of pleading of crime: the voyage of redemption of souls of modern human beings

In the process for clarifying facts and fighting for himself, K. gradually realized his crimes. The story told by the priest wakened K. Afterwards, his attitude towards the reality totally changed. At the end of the novel, Kafka described the sentence of K.. K. did not resist. Even, K. coordinated the two Jack Ketches to sentence him. Kafka let K. accept death with a peaceful and obedient mood.

Such description contradicts with the initial description of K., rebelling against the court. Why there is such difference? What makes K. face death so peacefully? “One piece of evidence for the popularity of crimes is that every people shall face the consequence of crime, that is, death. Maybe human beings would not like to admit that every one has committed crime; however, every one has to admit and cannot escape from death. It has been stated in the *Bible* that death is the consequence of crime” (Xu, 2006).

Before the God, the end of guilty people is death. After experiencing the accusation of crime and the understanding of crime, K. clearly understood the existence process of human life and realized that death was the end for every one. After encountered failure for several times when searching for helps from others, K. was led to a big church and communicated with the priest there. He was told by the priest the story named “in front of the door of law”. There are two characters in the story. One is the gatekeeper guarding in front of the door of law and the other is a farmer who wants to go into the door of law and is kept out of the door. The gatekeeper enlightens the farmer that he could go through the door but has to wait for the right moment. Therefore, the farmer devotionally waits outside the door till the coming of the end of his life. Just at the end of his life, he sees a light endlessly radiating from the door of law. Maybe the light is the redemption light. In the church, K. also saw a silvery holy picture flashing with silvery light in from of his eyes.

The priest told K. that he belonged to the court, but had no requirement on K.. He said, “The court does not place any requirement on you. If you come, the court will take you. If you leave, the court will let you go” (Kafka, 2003). At that moment, the priest is just like the gatekeeper, while K. the farmer. The law is the God. Human beings are free. If they believe in God, they can come. If not, they can leave as they want. The God calls for human beings, however do not force them. Human beings can make choice freely. If they believe in God, they will have belief. If not, they will wonder on the earth. At that moment, K. had already been attracted by the speech of the priest. Although he said that he should leave the church and go back to the bank, he still approached the priest. “Just because the symbols of belief strive out of extreme suspicion, through the examination and clarifying, their trueness is valuable and fierce. ‘Human beings cannot live without everlasting belief on an unbeatable thing’”(Brod, 1997). K. experienced a tortuous process for his re-communication with the God. However, can he be saved after believing in the God? Kafka is not sure either.

Max Brod, good friend of Kafka, believed that from the aspect of religious thoughts, Kafka shall be categorized as “crisis theology”. “The trend of such theology is that between the God and human beings and between human beings and the virtuous acts generated by the power of human beings, there lies a gab than can never be filled” (Brod, 1997). It is this gad that makes the end of *The Trail* obscure. K. acknowledged crime, understood the alienation of human beings from the God and realized the importance of belief on the life of human beings. However, the modern human beings can never reach the former relationship with the God. K, grasping the slim hope to be saved, chose death without any rebelling.

“Every great litterateur always can clearly demonstrate certain things in life that no one can see clearly before him. Then, what is made clear by Kafka? It should be the unclearness of life” (Brod, 1997). In *The Trial*, Kafka shows people the chaos of modern life, especially the spiritual life. It is the alienation from the God that caused the absence of belief. He shows modern people their own living state, and points out the direction of the beginning of a new life. But he also points out the unclearness of life. He was unsure about the resumption of the relationship between human and God. He did not know whether the soul of human could be saved finally. So, K. died with helpless compromise. It is still a question that where is the destination of the soul of human. No one knows that when we can get a satisfactory answer.

At the end of the novel, Kafka stills leaves a slime hope for readers. Before K. was put to death, his eyes rest on the top of a house beyond the stone filed. He saw a flashing of light. Then, one window of the house opened and one man suddenly leaned out of the window. K was thinking: who is that? A friend? A good man? A man with sympathy? A man who is willing to help others? Just one man or all the men? Can we be saved? Are there cases that were forgotten to be appealed? There must be such cases. Logic is unshakable, but it cannot stop a man with hope of living from holding hopes. Where is the judge he had never seen? Where is the highest court that he failed to enter into? He raised his hands and stretched his ten figures … …

Where is the God? Who will save the human beings on the earth with sins? How long will the punishment that put human beings wonder lonely in the voyage of redemption last? Kafka used a series of question marks to let L. cry that the human beings living in the modern spiritual wold are waiting for the coming of being saved.

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